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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 539. FOR WEEK ENDING APRIL 29TH, 1899. [ONE PENNY.

Disordered Nerves.

When the Nerves are disordered, when trifles jar the mind and cause the nerves to jangle and respond painfully to any effort they are called upon to make, when the spirits are low, the Mind depressed, with a desire to let things slide and do their worst, then it is that Guy's Tonic should be forthwith used. The good it will do in strengthening the whole Nerve and Physical tone of the body is very great, and speedily makes itself manifest in cheerier Spirits, in increased Energy, and greater Physical Strength and Vigour.

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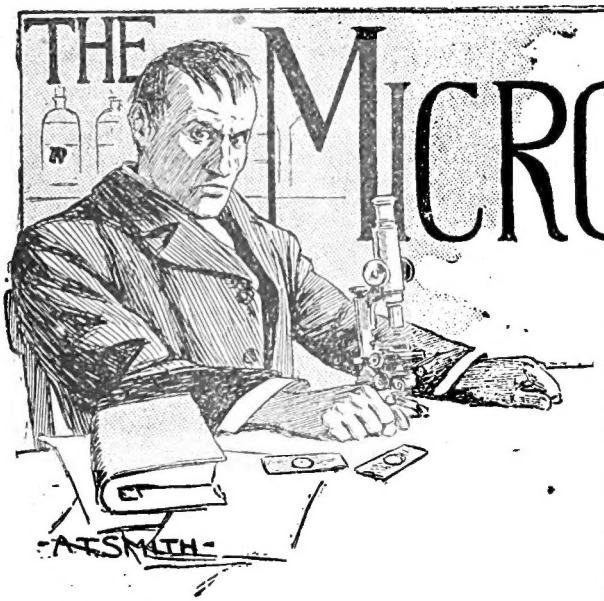

Ever since my boyhood my inclination had been towards microscopic studies. When I was ten, I had an instrument given me which, though a mere toy, was so much better than anything I had looked through previously that I wandered about for hours in solitude, examining drops of rain and all kinds of objects. I made up my mind that my life should be devoted to that science; but I did not have things quite my own way.

As I grew up, my parents, who saw but little likelihood of anything practical resulting from the examination of bits of moss and drops of water through a brass tube and a bit of glass, were anxious that I should choose a profession. It was their desire that I should enter the counting-house of my uncle, Edward Blake, a prosperous merchant, who carried on business in London. This suggestion I decisively combated. I had no taste for trade; I should only make a failure; in short, I refused to become a merchant.

But it was necessary for me to select some pursuit. My parents were staid people, who insisted on the necessity of labour, and, therefore, although, thanks to the bequest of my poor Aunt Alice, I should, on coming of age, inherit a small fortune, sufficient to place me above want, it was decided that, instead of waiting for this, I should act the nobler part, and employ the intervening years in rendering myself independent.

After much cogitation I complied with the wishes of my family, and selected a profession.

I determined to study medicine in London.

This disposition of my future suited me. A removal from my relations would enable me to dispose of my time as I pleased without fear of detection.

I might shirk attending the lectures if I chose; and, as I never had the remotest intention of going through an examination, there was no danger of my being "plucked." Besides, a metropolis was the place for me.

There I could obtain excellent instruments, the newest publications, intimacy with men of pursuits kindred with my own—in short, all things necessary to insure a profitable devotion of my life to my beloved science.

I had an abundance of money, few desires that were not bounded by my illuminating mirror on one side and my object-glass on the other; what, therefore, was to prevent my becoming an illustrious investigator of the veiled worlds?

It was with the most buoyant hope that I left my home and established myself in London.

My first step, of course, was to find suitable apartments. These I obtained after a couple of days' search, a very pretty second floor unfurnished, containing sitting-room, bedroom, and a smaller apartment which I intended to fit up as a laboratory. I furnished my lodgings simply, but rather elegantly, and then devoted all my energies to the temple of my worship.

I set myself to work with a zeal which few scientific students have ever equalled. I had everything to learn relative to the delicate study upon which I had embarked—a study involving the most earnest patience, the most rigid analytical powers, the steadiest hand, the most untiring eye, the most refined and subtle manipulation.

For a long time half my apparatus lay unused on the shelves of my laboratory, which was now most amply furnished with every possible contrivance for facilitating my investigations. The fact was that I did not know how to use some of my scientific implements—never having been taught microscopy—and those whose use I understood theoretically were of little avail, until by practice I could obtain the necessary delicacy of handling. Still, such was the strength of my ambition, such the untiring perseverance of my experiments, that in the course of one year I became theoretically and practically an accomplished microscopist.

During this period of my labours, in which I submitted specimens of every substance that came under my observation to the action of my lenses, I became a discoverer—in a small way, it is true, for I was very young, but still a discoverer. It was I who destroyed Ehrenberg's theory that the Volvox globator was an animal, and proved that the "monads" with stomachs and eyes, were merely phrases of the formation of a vegetable cell. Still I felt dissatisfied. At every step I found myself stopped by the imperfections of my instruments. Like all active microscopists, I gave my imagination full play. Indeed, it is a common complaint against many such, that they supply the defects of their instruments with the creations of their brains. I imagined depths beyond depths in nature which the limited power of my lenses prohibited me from exploring.

I lay awake at night constructing imaginary microscopes of immeasurable power, with which I seemed to pierce through all the envelopes of matter down to its

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original atom. How I longed to discover the secret of some perfect lens, whose magnifying power should be limited only by the resolvability of the object, and which at the same time should be free from spherical and chromatic aberrations, in short from all the obstacles over which the poor microscopist finds himself continually stumbling.

I felt convinced that the simple microscope, composed of a single lens of such vast yet perfect power, was possible of construction.

To attempt to bring the compound microscope up to such a pitch would have been commencing at the wrong end; this latter being simply a partially successful endeavour to remedy those very defects of the simple instrument, which, if conquered, would leave nothing to be desired.

It was in this mood that I became a constructive microscopist. After another year passed in this new pursuit, experimenting on every imaginable substance—glass, gems, flints, crystals, artificial crystals formed of the alloy of various vitreous materials—in short, having constructed as many varieties of lenses as Argus had eyes, I found myself precisely where I started, with nothing gained save an extensive knowledge of glass-making.

I was almost dead with despair. My parents were surprised at my apparent want of progress in my medical studies (I had not attended one lecture since my arrival in the city), and the expenses of my mad pursuit had been so great as to embarrass me very seriously.

I was in this frame of mind one day, experimenting in my laboratory on a small diamond—that stone, from its great refracting power, having always occupied my attention more than any other—when a young Frenchman, who lived on the floor above me, and who occasionally visited me, entered the room.

I think that Jules Simon was a Jew. He had many traits of the Hebrew character, a love of jewellery, of dress, and of good living. There was something mysterious about him. He always had something to sell, and yet went into excellent society. When I say sell, I should perhaps have said peddle; for his operations were generally confined to the disposal of single articles—a picture, for instance, or a rare carving in ivory.

When I was first furnishing my rooms, he paid me a visit, which ended in my purchasing an antique silver lamp and some other knick-knacks for my sitting-room. Why Simon should pursue this petty trade I never could imagine. He apparently had plenty of money.

On the present occasion Simon entered my room in a state of considerable excitement.

"Ah! *mon ami!*" he cried, before I could even offer him the ordinary salutation, "it has occurred to me to be the witness of the most astonishing things in the world. I promenade myself to the house of Madame—. How does the little animal, le renard, name himself in Latin?"

"Vulpes," I answered.

"Ah! yes—Vulpes. I promenade myself to the house of Madame Vulpes."

"The spirit medium?"

"Yes, the great medium. Great heavens! what a woman! I write on a piece of paper many of questions concerning affairs the most secret—affairs that conceal themselves in the abysses of my heart the most profound; and behold! by example! what occurs? This woman makes my replies the most truthful to all of them. She talks to me of things that I do not love to talk of to myself. What am I to think? I am fixed to the earth!"

"Am I to understand you, M. Simon, that this Mrs. Vulpes replied to questions secretly written by you, which questions related to events known only to yourself?"

"Ah! more than that, more than that," he answered, with an air of some alarm. "She related to me things ——. But," he added, after a pause, and suddenly changing his manner, "why occupy ourselves with these follies? It was all the biology, without doubt. It goes without saying that it has not my credence. But why are we here, *mon ami?* It has occurred to me to discover the most beautiful thing as you can imagine—a vase with green lizards on it, composed by the great Bernard Palissy. It is in my apartment; let us mount. I go to show it to you."

I followed Simon mechanically; but my thoughts were far from Palissy and his enamelled ware, although I, like him, was seeking in the dark a great discovery. This casual mention of the spiritualist, Madame Vulpes, set me on a new track. What if this spiritualism should be really a great fact? What if, through communication with more subtle organisms than my own, I could reach at a single bound the goal, which perhaps a life of agonising mental toil would never enable me to attain?

While purchasing the Palissy vase from my friend Simon, I was mentally arranging a visit to Madame Vulpes.

Two evenings after this, thanks to an arrangement by letter and the promise of an ample fee, I found Madame Vulpes awaiting me at her residence alone. She was a coarse-featured woman, with keen and rather cruel dark eyes, and an exceedingly sensual expression about her mouth and under jaw. She received me in perfect silence, in an apartment on the ground-floor, very sparely furnished. In the centre of the room, close to where Mrs. Vulpes sat, there was a common round mahogany table. If I had come for the purpose of sweeping her chimney, the woman could not have looked more indifferent to my appearance. There was no attempt to inspire the visitor with awe. Everything bore a simple and practical aspect. This intercourse with the spiritual world was evidently as familiar an occupation with Mrs. Vulpes as eating her dinner or riding in an omnibus.

"You come for a communication, Mr. Linley?" said the medium, in a dry, business-like tone of voice.

"By appointment—yes."

"What sort of communication do you want? a written one?"

"Yes—I wish for a written one."

"From any particular spirit?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever known this spirit on this earth?"

"Never. He died long before I was born. I wish merely to obtain from him some information which he ought to be able to give better than any other."

"Will you seat yourself at the table, Mr. Linley," said the medium; "and place your hands upon it?"

I obeyed—Mrs. Vulpes being seated opposite to me, with her hands also on the table. We remained thus for about a minute and a half, when a violent succession of raps came on the table, on the back of my chair, on the floor immediately under my feet, and even on the window-panes. Mrs. Vulpes smiled composedly.

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"They are very strong to-night," she remarked. "You are fortunate." She then continued. "Will the spirits communicate with this gentleman?"

Vigorous affirmative.

"Will the particular spirit he desires to speak with communicate?"

A very confused rapping followed this interesting question.

"I know what they mean," said Mrs. Vulpes, addressing me; "they wish you to write down the name of the particular spirit you desire to converse with. Is that so?" she added, speaking to her invisible guests.

That it was so, was evident from the numerous affirmatory responses. While this was going on, I tore a slip from my pocket-book, and scribbled a name under the table.

"Will this spirit communicate in writing with this gentleman?" asked the medium once more.

After a moment's pause, her hand seemed to be seized with a violent tremour, shaking so forcibly that the table vibrated.

She said that a spirit had seized her hand and would write. I handed her some sheets of paper that were on the table, and a pencil. The latter she held loosely in her hand, which presently began to move over the paper with a singular and seemingly involuntary motion. After a few moments had elapsed, she handed me the paper, on which I found written, in a large, uncultivated hand, the words, "He is not here, but has been sent for."

A pause of a minute or so now ensued, during which Mrs. Vulpes remained perfectly silent, but the raps continued at regular intervals. When the short period I mention had elapsed, the hand of the medium was again seized with its convulsive tremour, and she wrote, under this strange influence, a few words on the paper, which she handed to me. They were as follows:

"I am here. Question me.

"LEEUWENHOEK."

I was astounded. The name was identical with that I had written beneath the table, and carefully kept concealed. Neither was it at all probable that an uncultivated woman like Mrs. Vulpes should know even the name of the great father of microscopy. I wrote on my slip—still concealing it from Mrs. Vulpes—a series of questions, which, to avoid tediousness, I shall place with the responses, in the order in which they occurred:

I. Can the microscope be brought to perfection?

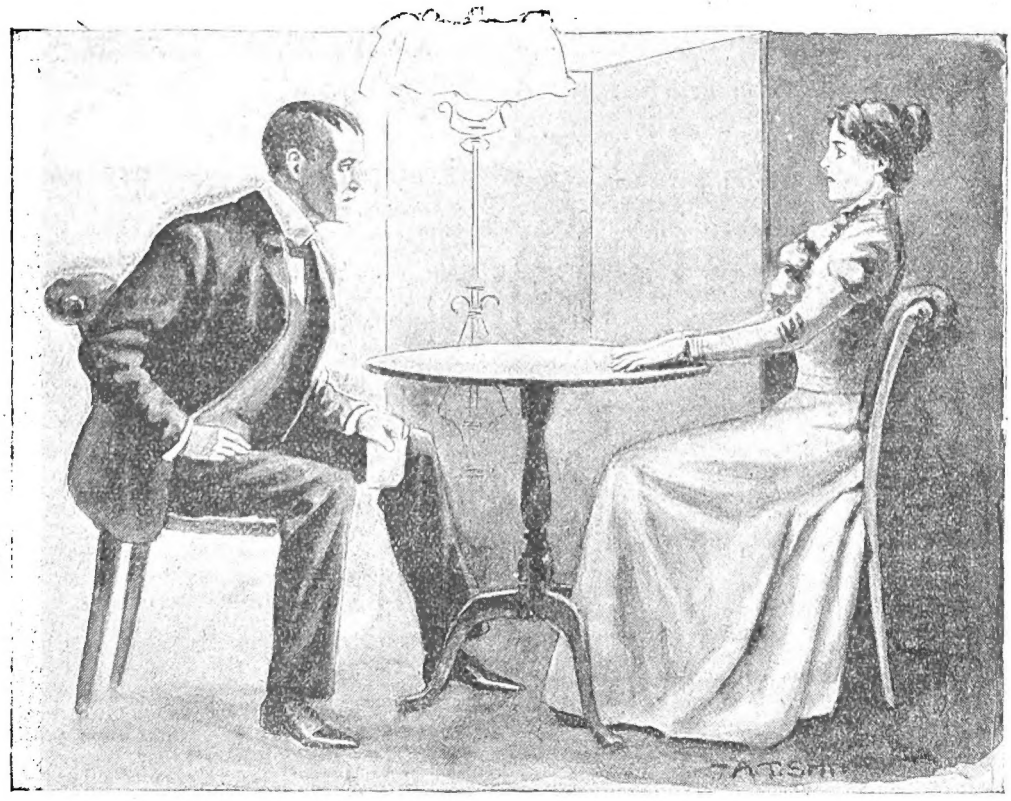
Spirit. Yes.

I. Am I destined to accomplish this great task?

Spirit. You are.

I. I wish to know how to proceed to obtain this end. For the love of which you bear to science, help me!

Spirit. A diamond of one hundred and forty carats, submitted to electro-magnetic current for a long period, will experience a rearrangement of its atoms *inter se*, and from that stone you will form the universal lens.



I tore a slip from my pocket-book and scribbled a name under the table.

I. Will great discoveries result from the use of such a lens?

Spirit. So great that all that has gone before is as nothing.

I. But the refractive power of the diamond is so immense that the image will be formed within the lens. How is that difficulty to be surmounted?

Spirit. Pierce the lens through its axis, and the difficulty is obviated. The image will be formed in the pierced space, which will itself serve as a tube to look through. Now I am called. Good-night!

I cannot at all describe the effect that these extraordinary communications had upon me. I felt completely bewildered. No biological theory could account for the discovery of the lens. The medium might, by means of biological rapport with my mind, have gone so far as to read my questions, and reply to them coherently. But biology could not enable her to discover that magnetic currents would so alter the crystals of the diamond as to remedy its previous defects, and admit of its being polished into a perfect lens. Some such theory may have passed through my head, it is true; but, if so, I had forgotten it.

In my excited condition of mind, there was no course left but to become a convert, and it was in a state of the most painful nervous exaltation that I left the medium's house that evening.

I walked home with but one thought possessing me—how to obtain a diamond of the immense size required. My entire means, multiplied a hundred times over, would have been inadequate to its purchase. Besides, such stones are rare, and become historical. I could find such only in the regalia of monarchs.

There was a light in Simon's room as I entered the house.

A vague impulse urged me to visit him. As I opened the door of his sitting-room unannounced, he was bending, with his back towards me, over a carcel lamp, apparently engaged in minutely examining some object which he held in his hands. As I entered, he started suddenly, thrust his hand into his breast-pocket, and turned to me with a face crimson with confusion.

"What!" I cried. "Poring over the miniature of some fair lady? Well, don't blush so much; I won't ask to see it."

Simon laughed awkwardly enough, but made none of the negative protestations usual on such occasions. He asked me to take a seat.

"Simon," said I, "I have just come from Madame Vulpes."

This time Simon turned as white as a sheet, and seemed stupefied as if a sudden electric shock had smitten him. He babbled some incoherent words, and went hastily to a small cupboard where he usually kept his liquors.

Although astonished at his emotions, I was too preoccupied with my own idea to pay much attention to anything else.

"You speak truly when you call Madame Vulpes a devil of a woman," I continued. "Simon, she told me wonderful things to-night, or rather was the means of telling me wonderful things. Ah! if I could only get a diamond that weighed one hundred and forty carats!"

Scarcely had the sigh with which I uttered this desire died upon my lips, when Simon, with the aspect of a wild beast, glared at me savagely, and, rushing to the mantelpiece, where some foreign weapons hung on the wall, caught up a Malay creese, and brandished it furiously before him.

"No!" he cried in French, into which he always broke when excited. "No! you shall not have it! You are perfidious! You have consulted with that demon, and desire my treasure! But I will die first! Me! I am brave! You cannot make me fear!"

All this, uttered in a loud voice trembling with excitement, astounded me. I saw at a glance that I had accidentally trodden upon the edges of Simon's secret, whatever it was. It was necessary to reassure him.

"My dear Simon," I said, "I am entirely at a loss to know what you mean. I went to Madame Vulpes to consult with her on a scientific problem, to the solution of which I discovered that a diamond of the size I just mentioned was necessary. You were never alluded to, during the evening, nor, so far as I was concerned even thought of. What can be the meaning of this outburst? If you happen to have a set of valuable diamonds in your possession, you need fear nothing from me. The diamond which I require you could not possess; or, if you did possess it, you would not be living here."

Something in my tone must have completely reassured him; for his expression immediately changed to a sort of constrained merriment, combined, however, with a certain suspicious attention to my movements. He laughed, and said that I must bear with him; that he was at certain moments subject to a species of vertigo, which betrayed itself in incoherent speeches, and that the attacks passed off as rapidly as they came. He put his weapon aside while making this explanation, and endeavoured, with some success, to assume a more cheerful air.

All this did not impose on me in the least. I was too much accustomed to analytical labours to be baffled by so flimsy a veil. I determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"Simon," I said gaily, "let us forget all this over a bottle of Burgundy. I have a case of Lausseure's Clos Vougeot downstairs."

I produced the wine and we seated ourselves to drink. By the time we had half finished the second bottle, Simon's head, which I knew was a weak one, had begun to yield, while I remained as calm as ever, only that every draught seemed to send a flush of vigour through my limbs.

Simon's utterance became more and more indistinct. He took to singing French *chansons*. I rose suddenly from the table just at the conclusion of one of those incoherent verses, and, fixing my eyes on him with a quiet smile said:

"Simon, I have deceived you. I learnt your secret this evening. You may as well be frank with me. Mrs. Vulpes, or rather one of her spirits, told me all."

He started with horror. His intoxication seemed for the moment to fade away, and he made a movement towards the weapon that he had a short time before laid down. I stopped him with my hand.

"Monster!" he cried passionately; "I am ruined! What shall I do? You shall never have it! I swear by my mother!"

"I don't want it," I said; "rest secure, but be frank with me. Tell me all about it."

The drunkenness began to return. He protested with maudlin earnestness that I was entirely mistaken—that I was intoxicated; then asked me to swear eternal secrecy, and promised to disclose the mystery to me.

I pledged myself, of course, to all. With an uneasy look in his eyes, and hands unsteady with drink and nervousness, he drew a small case from his breast and

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opened it. Heavens! How the mild lamp-light was shivered into a thousand prismatic arrows, as it fell upon a vast rose-diamond that glittered in the case!

I was no judge of diamonds, but I saw at a glance that this was a gem of rare size and purity. I looked at Simon with wonder, and—must I confess it?—with envy.

How could he have obtained this treasure? In reply to my questions, I could just gather from his drunken statements (of which, I fancy, half the incoherence was affected) that he had been superintending a gang of slaves engaged in diamond-washing in Brazil; that he had seen one of them secrete a diamond, but, instead of informing his employers, had quietly watched the negro until he saw him bury his treasure: that he had dug it up and fled with it, but that as yet he was afraid to attempt to dispose of it publicly—so valuable a gem being almost certain to attract too much attention to its owner's antecedents—and he had not been able to discover any of those obscure channels by which such matters are conveyed away safely. He added that, in accordance with the Oriental practice, he had named his diamond with the fanciful title of "The Eye of Morning."

While Simon was relating this to me, I regarded the great diamond attentively. Never had I beheld anything so beautiful. All the glories of light ever imagined or described, seemed to pulsate in its crystalline chambers.

Its weight, as I learnt from Simon, was exactly one hundred and forty carats. Here was an amazing coincidence. The hand of destiny seemed in it. I determined, with most perfect deliberation, to possess myself of Simon's diamond.

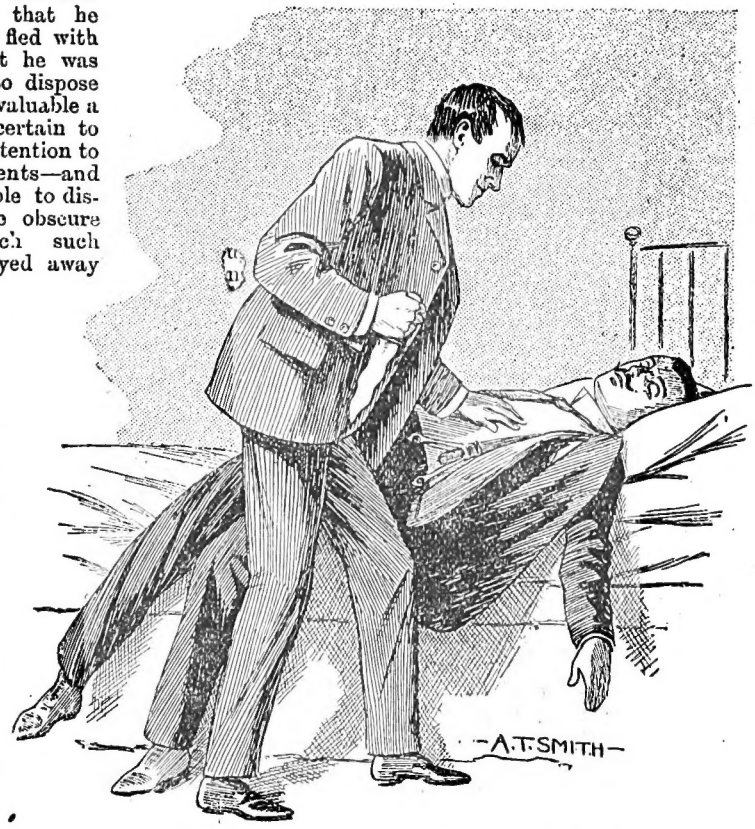
I sat opposite him while he nodded over his glass, and calmly revolved the whole affair. I did not for an instant contemplate so foolish an act as a common theft, which would of course be discovered, or at least necessitate flight and concealment, all of which must interfere with my scientific plans.

There was but one step to be taken—to kill Simon. After all, what was the life of a little peddling Jew, in comparison with the interests of science?

The means for accomplishing everything I desired lay within my reach. There stood upon the mantel-piece a bottle half full of French laudanum. Simon was so occupied with his diamond, which I had just restored to him, that it was an affair of no difficulty to drug his glass. In a quarter of an hour he was in a profound sleep.

I now opened his waistcoat, took the diamond from the inner pocket in which he had placed it, and removed him to the bed, on which I laid him so that his feet hung down over the edge. I had possessed myself of the Malay creese, which I held in my right hand, while with the other I discovered as accurately as I could by pulsation the exact locality of the heart.

It was essential that all the aspects of his death should lead to the surmise of self-murder. I calculated the exact angle at which it was probable that the weapon, if levelled by Simon's own hand, would enter his breast; then with one powerful blow I thrust it up to the hilt in the very spot which I desired to penetrate. A convulsive thrill ran through Simon's limbs. I heard a smothered sound issue from his throat, precisely like the bursting of a large air-bubble, sent up by a diver, when it reaches the surface of the water; he turned half round on his side, and, as if to assist my plans more effectually, his right hand, moved by some mere spasmodic impulse, clasped the handle of the creese, which it remained holding with extraordinary muscular tenacity. Beyond this there was no apparent struggle. The laudanum, I presume, paralysed the usual nervous action. He must have died instantly.



I discovered . . . the exact locality of the heart.

There was yet something to be done. To make it certain that all suspicion of the act should be diverted from any inhabitant of the house to Simon himself, it was necessary that the door should be found in the morning locked on the inside. How to do this, and afterwards escape myself?

Not by the window; that was a physical impossibility. Besides, I was determined that the windows also should be found fastened.

The solution was simple enough. I descended softly to my own room for a peculiar instrument which I had used for holding small, slippery substances, such as minute spheres of glass, etc. This instrument was nothing more than a long, slender hand-vice, with a very powerful grip, and considerable leverage, which last was accidentally owing to the shape of the handle.

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Nothing was simpler than, when the key was in the lock, to seize the end of its stem in this vice, through the keyhole, from the outside, and so lock the door.

Previous, however, to doing this, I burnt a number of papers on Simon's hearth. Suicides almost always burn paper before they destroy themselves.

I also emptied some more laudanum into Simon's glass—having first removed from it all traces of wine—cleaned the other wine glass, and brought the bottles away with me.

If traces of two persons drinking had been found in the room, the question naturally would have arisen, "Who was the second?"

Besides, the wine-bottles might have been identified as belonging to me. The laudanum I poured out to account for its presence in his stomach, in case of a post-mortem examination. The theory naturally would be, that he first intended to poison himself, but, after swallowing a little of the drug, was either disgusted with its taste, or changed his mind from other motives, and chose the dagger.

These arrangements made, I walked out, leaving the gas burning, locked the door with my vice, and went to bed.

Simon's death was not discovered until nearly three in the afternoon. The servant, astonished at seeing the gas burning—the light streaming on the dark landing from under the door—peeped through the keyhole and saw Simon on the bed. She gave the alarm. The door was burst open, and the neighbourhood was in a fever of excitement.

Every one in the house was arrested, myself included. There was an inquest; but no clue to his death beyond that of suicide could be obtained. Curiously enough, he had made several speeches to his friends the preceding week that seemed to point to self-destruction.

The jury, after a prolonged deliberation, brought in the usual verdict, and the neighbourhood once more settled down into its accustomed quiet.

The three months succeeding Simon's catastrophe I devoted night and day to my diamond lens. I had constructed a vast galvanic battery, composed of nearly two thousand pairs of plates—a higher power I dared not use, lest the diamond should be calcined. By means of this enormous engine I was enabled to send a powerful current of electricity continually through my great diamond, which, it seemed to me, gained in lustre every day.

At the expiration of a month I commenced the grinding and polishing of the lens, a work of intense toil and exquisite delicacy. The great density of the stone, and the care required to be taken with the curvatures of the surfaces of the lens, rendered the labour the severest and most harassing that I had yet undergone.

At last the eventful moment came; the lens was completed. I stood trembling upon the threshold of new worlds. I had the realisation of Alexander's famous wish before me. The lens lay on the table, ready to be placed upon its platform. My hand fairly shook as I enveloped a drop of water with a thin coating of oil of turpentine, preparatory to its examination—a process necessary in order to prevent the rapid evaporation of the water.

I now placed the drop on a thin slip of glass under the lens, and throwing upon it, by the combined aid of a prism and a mirror, a powerful stream of light, I approached my eye to the minute hole drilled through the axis of the lens. For an instant I saw nothing save what seemed to be an illuminated chaos, a vast luminous abyss. A pure white light, cloudless and serene, and seemingly limitless as space itself, was my first impression.

Gently, and with the greatest care, I depressed the lens a few hairs'-breadths. The wondrous illumination still continued, but as the lens approached the object a scene of indescribable beauty was unfolded to my view.

I seemed to gaze upon a vast space, the limits of which extended far beyond my vision. An atmosphere of magical luminousness permeated the entire field of view. I was amazed to see no trace of animalculous life. Not a living thing, apparently, inhabited that dazzling expanse. I comprehended instantly that by the wondrous power of my lens I had penetrated beyond the grosser particles of aqueous matter, beyond the realms of infusoria and protozoa, down to the original gaseous globule, into whose luminous interior I was gazing, as into an almost boundless dome filled with a supernatural radiance.

It was, however, no brilliant void into which I looked. On every side I beheld beautiful inorganic forms, of unknown texture, and coloured with the most enchanting hues. These forms presented the appearance of what might be called, for want of a more specific definition, foliated clouds of the highest rarity; that is, they undulated and broke into vegetable formations, and were tinged with splendours compared with which the gilding of our autumn woodlands is as dross compared with gold.

Far away into the illimitable distance stretched long avenues of the gaseous forests, dimly transparent, and painted with prismatic hues of unimaginable brilliancy. The pendant branches waved along the fluid glades until every vista seemed to break through half-lucent ranks of many coloured drooping silken pennons.

What seemed to be either fruits or flowers, dyed with a thousand hues, lustrous and ever varying, bubbled from the crowns of this fairy foliage. No hills, no lakes, no rivers, no forms animate or inanimate, were to be seen, save these vast auroral copses that floated serenely in the lumious stillness with leaves and fruits and flowers gleaming with unknown fires, unrealisable by mere imagination.

How strange, I thought, that this sphere should be condemned to solitude! I had hoped, at least, to discover some new form of animal life—perhaps with a lower class than any with which we are at present acquainted, but still, some living organism. I found my newly discovered world, if I may so speak, a beautiful desert.

While I was speculating on the singular arrangements of the internal economy of Nature, with which she so frequently splinters into atoms our most compact theories, I thought I beheld a form moving slowly through one of the glades of one of the prismatic forests. I looked more attentively, and found that I was not mistaken. Words cannot depict the anxiety with which I waited the nearer approach of this mysterious object.

Was it merely some inanimate substance, held in suspense in the attenuated atmosphere of the globule? or was it an animal endowed with vitality and motion? It approached, flitting behind the gauzy, coloured veils of cloud-foliage, for seconds dimly revealed then vanishing; they were gently pushed aside, and the form floated out into the broad light.

It was a female human shape. When I say human, I mean it possessed the outlines of humanity—but there

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the analogy ends. Its adorable beauty lifted its illimitable heights beyond the loveliest daughter of Adam.

I cannot, I dare not attempt to inventory the charms of this divine revelation of perfect beauty. Those eyes of mystic violet, dewy and serene, evade my words. Her long, lustrous hair following her glorious head in a golden wake, like the tract sown in heaven by a falling star, seems to quench my most burning phrases with its splendours. If all the bees of Hybia nestled upon my lips, they would still sing but hoarsely the wondrous harmonies of outline that inclosed her form.

She swept out from between the rainbow curtains of the cloud-trees into the broad sea of light that lay beyond. Her motions were those of some graceful naiad, cleaving, by a mere effort of her will, the clear, unruffled waters that fill the chambers of the sea. She floated forth with the serene grace of a frail bubble ascending through the still atmosphere of a June day. The perfect roundness of her limbs formed suave and enchanting curves. It was like listening to the most spiritual symphony of Beethoven the divine to watch the harmonious flow of lines. This, indeed, was a pleasure cheaply purchased at any price. What cared I, if I had waded to the portal of this wonder through another's blood? I would have given my own to enjoy one such moment of intoxication and delight.

Breathless with gazing on this lovely wonder, and forgetful for an instant of everything save her presence, I withdrew my eye from the microscope eagerly—alas! As my gaze fell on the thin slide that lay beneath my instrument, the bright light from mirror and from prism sparkled on a colourless drop of water. There, in that tiny bead of dew, this beautiful being was for ever imprisoned. The planet Neptune was not more distant from me than she. I hastened once more to apply my eye to the microscope.

Animula (let me now call her by that dear name which I subsequently bestowed on her) had changed her position. She had again approached the wondrous forest, and was gazing earnestly upward. Presently one of the trees, as I must call them, unfolded a long ciliary process, with which it seized one of the gleaming fruits that glittered on its summit, and sweeping slowly down, held it within reach of Animula. The sylph took it in her delicate hand and began to eat. My attention was so entirely absorbed by her, that I could not apply myself to the task of determining whether this singular plant was or was not instinct with volition.

I watched her, as she made her repast, with the most profound attention. The suppleness of her motions sent a thrill of delight through my frame; my heart beat madly as she turned her beautiful eyes in the direction of the spot in which I stood. What would I not have given to have had the power to precipitate myself into that luminous ocean, and float with her through those groves of purple and gold! While I was thus breathlessly following her every moment, she suddenly started, seemed to listen for a moment, and then leaving the brilliant ether in which she was floating, like a flash of light, pierced through the opaline forest and then disappeared.

Instantly a series of the most singular sensations attacked me. It seemed as if I had suddenly gone blind. The luminous sphere was still before me, but my daylight had vanished. What caused this sudden disappearance? Had she a lover or a husband? Yes, that was the solution! Some signal from a happy fellow-being had vibrated through the avenues of the forest and she had obeyed the summons.

The agony of my sensations, as I arrived at this conclusion, startled me. I tried to reject the conviction that my reason forced upon me. I battled against the fatal conclusion—but in vain. It was so. I had no escape from it. I loved an animalcule!

It is true that, thanks to the marvellous power of my microscope, she appeared of human proportions. Instead of presenting the revolting aspect of the coarser creatures that live and struggle and die in the more easily resolvable portions of the water-drop, she was fair and delicate and of surpassing beauty. But of what account was all that? Everytime that my eye was withdrawn from the instrument, it fell on a miserable drop of water, within which, I must be content, to know, dwelt all that could make my life lovely.

Could she but see me once! Could I for one moment pierce the mystical walls that so inexorably rose to separate us, and whisper all that filled my soul, I might consent to be satisfied for the rest of my life with the knowledge of her remote sympathy. It would be something to have established even the faintest personal link to bind us together—to know that at times, when roaming through those enchanted glades, she might think of the wonderful stranger, who had broken the monotony of her life with his presence, and left a gentle memory in her heart!

But it could not be. No invention of which human intellect was capable could break down the barriers that Nature had erected. I might feast my soul upon her wondrous beauty, yet she must always remain ignorant of the adoring eyes that day and night gazed upon her and, even when closed, beheld her in dreams. With a bitter cry of anguish I fled from the room, and, flinging myself on my bed, sobbed myself to sleep like a child.

I arose the next morning almost at daybreak, and rushed to my microscope. I trembled as I sought the luminous world in miniature that contained my all. Animula was there. I had left the gas-lamp, surrounded by its moderators, burning when I went to bed the night before. I found the sylph bathing, as it were, with an expression of pleasure animating her features, in the brilliant light that surrounded her.

She tossed her lustrous golden hair over her shoulders with innocent coquetry. She lay at full length in the transparent medium, in which she supported herself with ease, and gambolled with the enchanting grace that the nymph Salmacis might have exhibited when she sought to conquer the modest Hermaphroditus.

I tried an experiment to satisfy myself if her powers of reflection were developed. I lessened the lamp-light considerably. By the dim light that remained, I could see an expression of pain flit across her face. She looked up suddenly, and her brows contracted. I flooded the stage of the microscope again with a full stream of light, and her whole expression changed. She sprang forward like some substance deprived of all weight. Her eyes sparkled and her lips moved. Ah! if science had only the means of conducting and reduplicating sounds, as it does the rays of light, what carols of happiness would then have entranced my ears!

I now comprehended how it was that the Count de Gabalis peopled his mystic world with sylphs—beautiful beings whose breath of life was lambent fire, and who sported for ever in regions of purest ether and purest light. The Rosicucian had anticipated the wonder that I had practically realised.

How long this worship of my strange divinity went on

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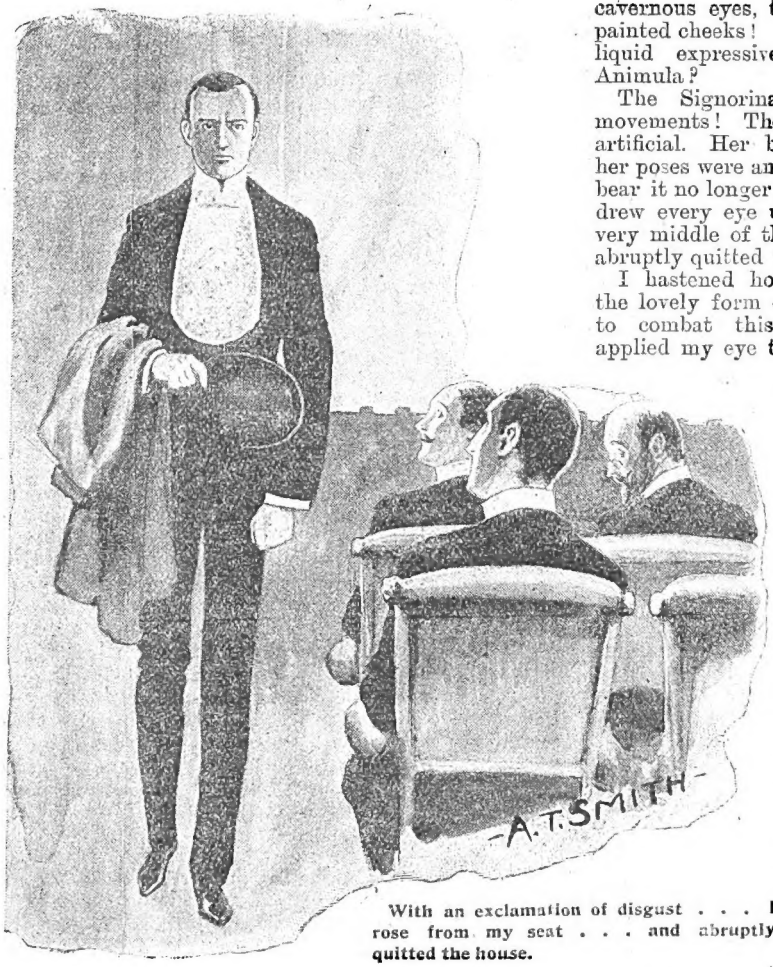

With an exclamation of disgust . . . I rose from my seat . . . and abruptly quitted the house.

thus I scarcely know. I lost all note of time. All day from early dawn, and far into the night, I was to be found peering through that wonderful lens. I saw no one, went nowhere, and scarcely allowed myself sufficient time for my meals.

At length, I grew so pale and emaciated, for want of rest, and continual brooding over my insane love and its cruel conditions, that I determined to make some effort to wean myself from it.

I looked over the newspapers by chance. There I beheld the advertisement of a celebrated *danseuse* who appeared nightly at Niblo's. The Signora Caradolce had the reputation of being the most beautiful as well as the most graceful woman in the world. I instantly dressed and went to the theatre.

The curtain drew up. The usual semicircle of fairies in white muslin were standing on the right toe around the enamelled flower-bank of green canvas on which the belated prince was sleeping. Suddenly a flute is heard. The fairies start. The trees open, the fairies all stand on the left toe and the queen enters.

It was the Signorina. She bounded forward amid thunders of applause, and, lighting on one foot, remained poised in the air.

Those heavy, muscular limbs, those thick ankles, those cavernous eyes, that sterotyped smile, those crudely painted cheeks! Where were the vermeil blooms, the liquid expressive eyes, the harmonious limbs of Animula?

The Signorina danced. What gross, discordant movements! The play of her limbs was all false and artificial. Her bounds were painful athletic efforts; her poses were angular, and distressed the eye. I could bear it no longer; with an exclamation of disgust that drew every eye upon me, I rose from my seat in the very middle of the Signorina's *pas-de-fascination*, and abruptly quitted the house.

I hastened home to feast my eyes once more on the lovely form of my sylph. I felt that henceforth to combat this passion would be impossible. I applied my eye to the lens. Animula was there—but what could have happened? Some terrible change seemed to have taken place during my absence. Some secret grief seemed to cloud the lovely features of her I gazed upon. Her face had grown thin and haggard; her limbs trailed heavily; the wondrous lustre of her golden hair had faded. She was ill, and I could not assist her! I believe at that moment I would have gladly forfeited all the claims to my human birthright, if I could only have been dwarfed to the size of an animalcule and permitted to console her from whom fate had for ever divided me.

I racked my brain for the solution of this mystery. What was it that afflicted the sylph? Suddenly I remembered that I had not looked at the water-drop for several days. In fact I hated to see it; for it reminded me of the natural barrier between Animula and myself. I hurriedly looked down on the stage of the microscope. The slide was still there—but, great heavens! the water-drop had vanished! The awful truth burst upon me! it had evaporated, until it had become so minute as to be invisible to the naked eye; I had been gazing on its last atom, the one that contained Animula—and she was dying.

I rushed again to the front of the lens, and looked through. Alas! the last agony had seized her. The rainbow-hued forests had all melted away, and Animula lay struggling feebly in what seemed to be a spot of dim light. Ah! the sight was horrible; the limbs once so round and lovely shrivelling up into nothings; the eyes —those eyes that shone like heaven—being quenched into black dust; the lustrous golden hair now lank and discoloured. The last throe came. I beheld that final struggle of the blackening form—and I fainted.

When I awoke out of a trance of many hours I found myself lying amid the wreck of my instruments, myself shattered in mind and body as it were. I crawled feebly to my bed, from which I did not rise for months.

They say now that I am mad; but they are mistaken. I am poor for I have neither the heart nor the will to work; all my money is spent, and I live on charity. Young men's associations that love a joke invite me to lecture on optics before them.

"Linley, the mad microscopist," is the name I go by. I suppose that I talk incoherently while I lecture.

Fenton Haspen.

ALPHONSE AND JOSEPHINE.

I.

ALPHONSE wandered by the trout stream. He had a rod in his hand, but he didn't attempt to fish. He hadn't the heart.

"Ah, finny ones," muttered he. "you may frolic in security. You may leap out of the water and secure your fly. Your ingenuous trust shall not be betrayed. The plump bluebottle will be the genuine article. My hook shall not intrude upon your gills this day." Then he cast his tackle from him; and flinging himself upon the daisied turf, he gave liberty to a long pent sigh.

Alphonse was in love.

Josephine was as beautiful and as bright as the glowing sunshine of this summer's day. Josephine was exquisite. Josephine was celestial. Venus herself could not have eclipsed his Josephine.

This thought had scarcely flashed through his mind ere Alphonse started with surprise. He leant on his elbows, and gazed entranced into the waters. Was he enchanted? Could what he beheld be real? He was thinking of Venus, and lo! there he saw Josephine, not rising from the sea, but shimmering amidst the weeds and fishes.

Of course, it was only her shadow that the stream embraced. But think of embracing even that! Oh, lucky stream! And the fishes bobbing up and down caught flies under the very nose of Josephine's reflection.

"They are stealing kisses," cried the amorous Alphonse in a fit of jealousy.

It was then that he felt a gentle "prod." It had been administered by the ferrule end of a lady's sunshade. He looked up into Josephine's face, and was about leaping to his feet, when, with a grace and charm peculiar to herself, she spread out her handkerchief and sat down upon it, by his side.

Rapture!

He had such a lot to talk about that he didn't know where to begin; so for some moments they merely gazed into the stream together, and said nothing.

That's the worst of love: there's often so much in it that nothing expresses so well as silence.

After a while, Alphonse found his voice, and he murmered:

"Josephine!"

The tone in which he uttered this, and the look which accompanied it, spoke a whole volume of love, and was not nearly so wearisome. Josephine must have understood, for she blushed and sighed.

This emboldened him; he caught her dainty gloved hand; he clasped it, conveyed it to his enraptured lips, and—ah, we won't listen to their soft cooings, to their sweet warblings of love. Have we never been caught in Cupid's net ourselves?

How time sped! At last Josephine declared she really ought to be going, and she looked at her watch and wound it up. It was during this trivial operation that Alphonse indulged in a rascally trick. Quick as lightning, he had drawn from his pocket a pair of scissors, and he adroitly snipped off a curl—one of her ambient locks—without her being aware of it. It was one of those ringletty tresses that ladies wear clustered up behind sometimes. So the theft was not difficult to accomplish. Craftily, he secreted his treasure; then he escorted his unwitting lady-love on her way home.

Their road lay for the most part by the margin of the trout stream, and the little fishes would now and again peep up, and, of course, envy them. When the little fishes disappeared, they would leave behind a bubble and an eddying circle. This did not escape Alphonse's notice; nor did he lose the poetic opportunity. He whispered to Josephine that the bubbles were congratulations—as congratulations frequently are—and—the circlets were a pretty piscatorial way of suggesting the ring.

Ah, what an erratic being Alphonse was, and what an imagination he had!

II.

THE lovers were duly engaged.

Alphonse became so jealous of Josephine that he hated her to be looked at, and, like a turbaned Turk, he desired she should wear a veil.

She wouldn't.

Then the green-eyed monster battened on his prey. Alphonse had a bosom friend, and to him he confided the secret of his agony. This friend, who was of a philosophic, not to say mystical, turn of mind, advised a proceeding somewhat out of the common.

"Josephine," said he, "is no doubt, as you have told me frequently, exceedingly beautiful, and, lucky man that you are, I believe her charms are entirely for you. There exist men, myself included, who do not exactly see her with your adoring eyes. I am very fascinating. Now, bewitching though she may be, I should never have imagined it. That, of course, is my blindness, but, nevertheless, it may be fortunate for you, for I am very fascinating. Now Josephine appears to me, and, I think, to the world in general, a frigid sort of a girl, and—pardon me, not so young, but that she might be younger. You have no cause for jealousy."

"But," responded Alphonse in sombre tones, "what if I tell you I am jealous of the past, and of what, through that past, may be looming in the future?"

Nearly to the roots of his hair did his friend's eyebrows elevate themselves. What was he about to hear?

"Josephine has told me she has a secret." This confidence was whispered, and with a glance askance, as if he expected his inamorata to appear at his elbow and denounce him for the betrayal.

"And that secret is—?"

"Still in her own keeping.—But she assures me she will reveal it some day—some day. Ah, Gustave, my friend, can you not now comprehend the jealous pangs that rack my heart?"

"Women are apt to enlarge upon small matters, my dear Alphonse. This may only be a woman's wile to test your love, to try your faith. Think no more of it; and if she ever reverts to it, laugh at it."

"You can never have loved, for you cannot realise the intensity of my passion. Your advice is an impossibility."

"Then turn the other way about. Insist on knowing this secret at once."

"You are a brute. How could I be so indelicate?"

"Then unravel it by other means. Find it out your self and tax her with it. Then it would be at your own option to forgive her or to break off the match."

"Either would break my heart. But I think your advice good. Only how am I to set about it?"

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"Has she not given you some clue?"

"She has never given me anything."

"Dropped some suggestion?"

"She has dropped nothing."

"Umph; then I see but one way out of the difficulty. I have a friend who is a clairvoyant."

"I don't understand."

"He is also a psychometrist."

"And that is—?"

"Give him any small article of your apparel—a glove, a handkerchief—and by holding it against his forehead he will tell your character, and will give you a *résumé* of your past life. I have tested his powers, and what he has told me has been far more truthful than either flattering or pleasant."

"It is humbug."

"I should be sorry to say so from my experience Would you like to test it?"

"Well, I don't know. Yes; there can be no harm in that."

"Have you a glove, or ribbon, or anything that belonged to Josephine, anything that she has frequently worn?"

"I have—a lock of her hair."

"Excellent. To-morrow we will visit the scientist."

III.

"Maximilian, my friend, let me introduce you to an old chum of mine. Alphonse, this is Maximilian the renowned clairvoyant and psychometrist." And very soon they were all cosily seated in the latter gentleman's library.

Gustave soon broached the object of their visit "Max," said he, "I wish you would give us some evidence of your skill. My friend here is a sceptic."

"Sceptic is scarcely the appropriate word," interrupted Alphonse, and, bowing politely to his host, "I am utterly unacquainted with your strange science," said he, "and am not so foolish as to form an opinion upon a subject of which I am entirely ignorant."

"That is certainly proving yourself a sensible person," replied Max, returning the bow. "Unfortunately, the rule is, people begin by pooh-poohing what they don't understand. It gives such an air of superiority, and it saves so much trouble."

"Here is your test," continued Gustave, and, at a glance from him, Alphonse intrusted the cherished tress to the hands of Maximilian. "This," continued he, "was snipped from a lady's head only a few days ago, and has never since left my friend's possession."

"And I suppose you want me to tell you something about that lady?"

"Exactly."

Maximilian held the precious curl in the palm of his hand and pressed it gently against his brow. He remained quite still for a moment; then he looked angry: and then:

"Oh, oh!" said he with a start.

"What's the matter?" inquired Alphonse, awaiting the reply with bated breath.

"Oh, nothing, nothing—merely—umph—this hair has been dyed."

"Ah, that's the secret," and Gustave jumped up, slapping Alphonse on the shoulder. "That's the secret," cried he, "rest assured—dyed hair."

"Oh, there's a secret is there?" muttered the scientist. and he added quietly: "But I presume you know the past of the person?"

"No," interrupted Alphonse, in hasty eagerness, leaning forward in his chair. "No; that's just what I want to find out."

Maximilian quietly returned the lock: "I should rest contented with what I already know. I don't care to tell you anything further."

It was only after great pressure that the scientist could be persuaded to take the hair in his hand again.

"I do this under protest," said he, replacing it against his forehead. "Well, if you must have the truth, the person whose head this was cut from was—well, let us say, not a desirable individual to be acquainted with."

Alphonse crimsoned. Gustave got fidgety.

"A woman of—well—umph—just so."

Alphonse nearly fainted. Gustave looked serious.

"Must I go on?"

"If you please."

"I see the interior of a prison; I—oh, no, I'm extremely sorry to disoblige you, but I positively decline telling you more."

Alphonse, white as a lily to the very lips, mechanically took the proffered tress and thrust it into his pocket.

Bidding the psychometrist a hasty adieu, the two friends were soon in the street, and for a while they pursued their way in silence.

Suddenly Alphonse stopped short, and striking his fist upon a post, "I will go to Josephine at once," said he, "and have all this explained."

"Bravely resolved," cried his friend; and so that he shouldn't change his mind, Gustave took him by the arm and accompanied him to the very door of the house. Furthermore, he knocked at that door, and himself inquired for Josephine. On ascertaining that she was at home, he abruptly shook hands with Alphonse, and left him no option but to face the lady—and the difficulty.

Alphonse was ushered into his sweetheart's presence. Oh, he looked so ill and haggard! Josephine was knitting him a pair of socks when he entered, and she looked up to smile; but she dropped the wool and the needles, and she ran towards him in terror.

"My own, what is the matter?" she cried.

Her surprise may be imagined when he, in reply, seized her by the wrist and hissed into her ear: "Tell me your secret—or I shall do something desperate."

But she was too startled to utter a word.

"Josephine," he hurriedly continued, "I'm on the rack, and I can't stand it."

Then, scarcely knowing what he was doing, he dragged the stolen curl from his pocket, and cast it at her feet.

"Ah, you have discovered," cried she, and with a little shriek she hid her face in her hands.

"Tell me all, tell me the truth—let me know the worst," and he tried to drag away her hands.

"Oh, forgive me for deceiving you," and she burst into tears. "I would have told you all before, but I hadn't the courage. I didn't know how you'd take it."

"Go on."

"It wasn't my fault. I couldn't help it, I——"

"This is torture. Confess all, Josephine."

"It's very short at present."

"Short! Who's short? What's short?"

"But it's growing slowly, but it's growing."

"Josephine. do you want to send me mad?"

She raised her beautiful head and turned her tearful eyes towards him. She said no word, but clutching those ambient locks he loved so well, she took them off—she wore a wig.

A fever, a shaved head, a wig until her own hair grew again—this was Josephine's terrible secret.

Charles Daly.

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From Prairie and Backwoods.

V.—IN GOLD TIME.

He was straight, and grizzled, and keen of eye. He had worked, and fought, and gambled his way through the lawlessness and passion of the State's early life into the decency and uprightness of a successful contractor.

His name was Bill Bowen.

As a civil engineer, I came more or less in contact with him, and rejoiced in the largeness of his mental mould, as well as in the business sense of security he let me enjoy.

One summer's night we took a drive to a distant town on the San Joaquin River. We were to look at the stone for bridge building, and the blistering heat of the day made us willing to lose our sleep for the more comfortable travelling by starlight.

The horses jogged lazily through the coarse, thick dust on the river's bank, and the insects from the grain fields, and the frogs from the sloughs, had things wholly to themselves until Bill suddenly interrupted.

"Mrs. Chase is pretty enough yet to understand why she sent two fellows to destruction, isn't she?"

"What are you talking about?" I answered.

"Oh," said Bill, pulling himself up, "I forgot you didn't struggle with the rest of us through those days."

I knew Bill well enough to let him relapse with silence just so many minutes, then I said:

"Judge Chase's wife is lovelier at sixty than most girls at sixteen, but I hadn't an idea she figured so romantically in the early days as to send anybody overboard."

"H'm," replied Bill reflectively.

The horses travelled on without attention, and I waited patiently.

"You know what it was like," he began at last. "Men with guns from all over the Union, and gold the heaven we toiled for. Court, and the gambling tables running under one roof, and nary a woman's face showing up in the mass to give us courage.

"To be sure, there were vixenish creatures who robbed, and killed, and drank with the worst of us; but until '51 we'd never the woman for reverence. Then by degrees, the lawyers and a stray merchant or two came with their families, but things wasn't brisk till pretty Grace Blanchard got out with her father.

"Understand, she carried herself as she ought to; but, understand, there was men among us as was born and bred to live with blood. The mass of us had to take out our satisfaction in looking at her; but for two the favour in old Blanchard's eyes was easy reading and it wasn't long seeing the course the straw took.

"Ned Emory was a long, lean, fair fellow, with a fine face and a way that made friends of the toughest.

"They said he looked a swell when he called at the Blanchards', but I never saw him but like the rest of us—red-shirted and overalled, and an angle to his pistols that made him a joy.

"George Stokes—'Shorty,' we called him—was a man with an answer that ripped like a knife and a head that made success of everything, because it could work crooked as well as straight.

"He'd been on the bench, but he had located a vein at Mariposa, and was overseeing up there in '52. Naturally, he lost opportunities, not being right on the spot, and the danger began.

"The Blanchard house was larger than most of the cabins, and had two long windows that opened on to a porch. Things might never have been so bad but for those two lidless eyes in front.

"One fatal night Shorty Stokes rode into the settlement—but I'm getting ahead of affairs."

Bill tossed his cigar into the brush, and hurried the horses as the interest of his reminiscences swept him on.

"The girl carried herself after the fashion of high steppers, and neither fellow could swear where he stood. It was laughter and spirit for both of them, they said, and nip and tuck for the yielding. The pace was the sort that exhausts men, and Shorty's brain cooked up a scheme for his rescue. He was for their going together some night before her, and, after a formal marriage proposal, each argue his claim and fitness for ten minutes by the clock, their honour at stake to stand by her decision.

"It got about afterwards that Emory wouldn't consent till he saw by Shorty's earnestness that there would be mischief, and they swore with their fists in each other's to carry the thing through to the finish. The date and hour were arranged for the following Sunday night at eight, and they drank to it with gall in the cup.

"When the evening came the clock had already struck eight when Stokes reached the Blanchard house.

"The lights from the room fell over the porch, and from the shadow of the steps he saw the something that in all the world he couldn't bear to see—Emory crossing the

room to take Grace Blanchard in his arms; Emory with passion paling his face and Grace Blanchard in the beauty of a disturbing humility.

"He swore as he watched them cling to each other, and he took his way back to the saloons and his Mariposa mining.

"The next day he turned up again in the settlement, with enough liquor aboard to put a wheel in his head, and, after a losing fling at the tables, he started to find Emory.

"After a little ineffectual riding, he leapt from the back of his vicious-eyed piebald at the corner that bulged thickest with saloons, and stood close to the stirrup with his hand on his hip. Some one who noticed him said his face had the steely intensity of a razor edge.

"Then out of the crowd, unconscious, with the music of love in his heart, swung Ned Emory. His hat was pushed back on his fair hair, and he was whistling the overflow out of his veins.

"In one instant a bullet rang through the air, followed by another. Emory fell, in his own blood, and a horseman was riding off wildly and safe through the shower of bullets that rained round him. Every man with a mount tore in pursuit, but they only brought back eight half-dead horses. Stokes had staked relay beasts at different points along the road, and then was safe in the chapparal cañons towards the north.

"The gambling dens choked up with crowds; gold dust heaped on gold-dust for the reward of the cowardly hound. Murders weren't rare then, but there was only one Ned Emory, remember.

"Four of us wouldn't drop the search. We let the blood-money men get out of the way, and then we worked as we'd toil for only our own.

"There was scarcely no scent to follow, for Stokes had bribed the greasers who furnished the horses: but we forced our way along on nothing. Day and night we rode on with our eyes open, sometimes bullying and sometimes begging. It began to seem hopeless. The days were running into summer again.

"One afternoon, towards twilight, we rested on the crest of a mountain where the path took a sudden turn away from a two-hundred foot precipice.

"We were torn with the snapping branches of the greasewood, and full of extremest dirt and disgust. Suddenly we heard the rustle of a step on the fallen leaves. Under a live oak, not thirty yards away, on the very edge of the cliff, stood Shorty Stokes.

"He had not heard us, and he stood looking at the moon which hung like a sickle in the sky. The evening star was showing.

"The four of us were like stones. He could have got to Guinea before we moved. Then, simultaneously with our steps forward, he turned and looked into our faces.

"It was a moment to test any man. He stood it as we were used to seeing him face all things.

"'I suppose I'm the man you're after,' he said.

"He said it with the dignity of a parson.

"In a second he had thrown down his pistols. He unsheathed his knives and dropped them to the ground.

"'Take me,' he said.

"Four of us looked into the unflinching clearness of his eyes. As we hesitated, he spoke again.

"'Listen. It is not in excuse that I speak, nor in weakness. It is to tell you that those among you who are men will follow my steps under like circumstances.

"'Emory gave me his hand and his oath to stand by an arranged agreement.

"'We were to meet at eight o'clock on that Sunday night. A—a beautifully good woman was to decide our argument which man she would marry. In riding to meet my engagement I happened on a accident. Within half a mile of the settlement, close on time, my piebald went back on his haunches and the groan of a man came up from the roadside. I found an overloaded miner, hurt in the leg, and the hope in my own heart aroused my sympathy. I mounted the man on my beast and took him back towards camp.

"'Walk as I never walked. I reached the meeting place three minutes late. Ah! out in the darkness I saw Emory taking advantage of the delay.

"'None of you is so much a cur as to let the life run in a man who, under his honour, couldn't yield a rival three minutes' grace.

"'But, with the camp against me and Emory the friend of the sorriest, I couldn't face the music when the justice was done.

"'It is not mercy I ask. It is life hereafter. Come!'

"With a common impulse we started forward, only to halt in a frozen horror as Stoke's broncho threw up his head in alarm to watch with us the backward somersaulting of his master's body over the precipice.

"Though there was but one verdict, even Chase said, as we rode down over the mountain that night, 'Emory might have given Shorty a few minutes' grace.'"

"She jilted me for that fellow, Jim, when we were three days out from Liverpool."

"Threw you overboard in mid-ocean? Barbarous."

Guard (extricating passenger from the wreck of the smoking-carriage): "Are you hurt?"

Passenger: "I should say I am. The accident smashed my hand. I held a nap hand, and was knocked in a heap before I had a chance to play it."

"There seems to be a number of weddings this month," he remarked. "By the way, Miss Carrie, when will I be invited to yours?"

"Will you need an invitation?" she asked, with downcast eyes and mantling cheek.

Chollie: "I say, Fweddie, I see by the papahs that there is a woman in Stockton who cannot say anything except 'Yes' or 'No.'"

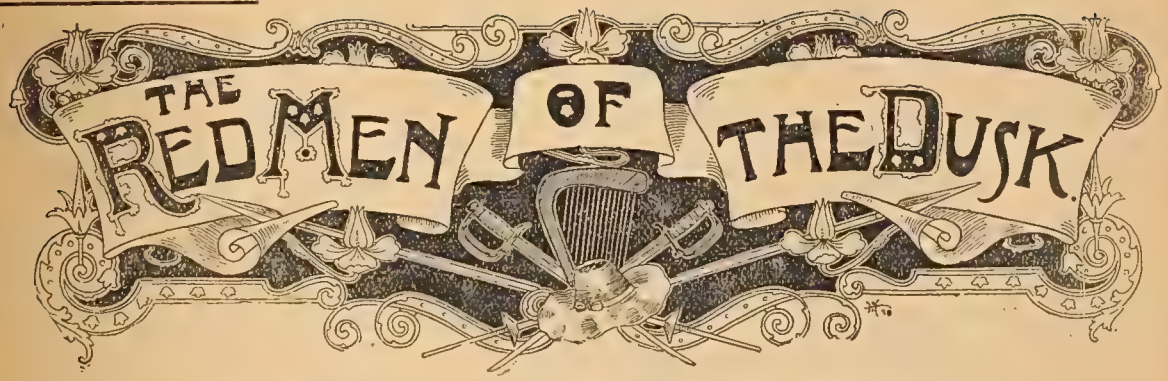
Fweddie: "That's nothing at all, Chollie, old boy. I met one last night who couldn't say anything except 'No.'"

In a provincial theatre, during the performance of a melodrama, an excited woman threw her bonnet at the "villain" on the stage who was strangling one of the characters. The applause following her action was uproarious, most of it coming from the gentleman who sat immediately in the rear of the bonnet.

"If I am wakeful at night," said the author, "I always put myself to sleep by following out, in my mind, the thread of some one of my poems from the beginning. Presently the verses become confused, and before long I am asleep."

"That's a fact," said the friend enthusiastically; "I can go to sleep over any one of them."

FIFTH INSTALMENT.



A Romance of the Seventeenth Century.

BY JOHN FINNEMORE.

SUMMARY.

GEOFFREY HEATHCOTE, who, for political reasons, is apprehensive of pursuit, leaves Butley Croft, in Worcestershire, and makes for the heart of Wales, where he has expectations of finding a sure refuge. Travelling among the Welsh mountains, Geoffrey narrowly escapes being trapped by a gang of thieves, and on a later occasion he joins in a fight against the same gang. Geoffrey then falls into the company of a hot-headed Welshman, who picks a quarrel. They fight, and Geoffrey, who has found more than his match, is saved by a woman, who is grateful to the refugee for having saved the life of her child. Suspicious characters gather round Geoffrey. Being mounted on a superior horse the refugee easily shakes off his wretched companions, and at a later period assists two ladies in escaping from a band of thieves. Geoffrey is hospitably entertained by a Welsh farmer, and on resuming this journey he encounters a handsomely dressed Welshman. The latter upbraids the English, and they fight with swords. At a critical moment the duel is stopped by the young girl whom Geoffrey had assisted, and who turns out to be no other than his own cousin. The refugee is welcomed by his uncle, with whom he stops. Geoffrey and his cousins Enid and Owain set out on an errand of mercy and are chased by "The Red Men," who attack the house and are ultimately repulsed. Geoffrey, who goes in pursuit of them, is shot in the head from the house, and suspects his uncle of the deed. Six Red Men are captured and hanged.

CHAPTER XII.

I TAKE THE ROAD AGAIN.

Up to this moment I had been popular with my uncle's followers, but within an hour of leaving the little wood I found that I had almost as many enemies at Nant-y-Bryn as there were people in the place. On every side I was met by scowling looks, and those who had a little English treated me to their impudence when it came in my way to speak to them. They were as frightened as their master at the Gwylliard Cochion, and as fully inclined to be ferocious and cruel.

I could see at once that my interference on behalf of the woman had greatly displeased them, and that their displeasure was reserved for me alone. Owain had, as they reasoned, seconded me to save me, and, besides, he was their familiar and their friend of a thousand days, while I, among so untutored a race, held ground only as Sir Arthur's kinsman. Our encounter in the wood had shown that my uncle had come to regard me with disfavour, and his tenants instantly hastened to range themselves with him. I became speedily aware that, with the exception of Owain and Enid Vaughan and their followers, Siani and the tall, old fellow who had come to misadventure with the Egyptian—his name was Gwilym—I must expect black looks wherever I turned.

This troubled me but little until the afternoon, when I found that the ill-will so suddenly sprung up against me might mean things which would trouble me a great deal. I went into the stable to give a look to Whitesock's comfort, as I did twice or thrice every day, and at the instant I entered, I saw a man strewing litter at the further end where she was. Whitesock is always uneasy when strangers approach her closely, and she edged away from the man to the other side of her stall. She was sidling about, but without the slightest show of viciousness, of which she has none, or temper, when the brutal fellow swung up a clumsy wooden bucket standing near at hand, and dashed it across her face at the full sweep of his arm. She gave a mingled scream of pain and anger, and the man leapt back straight into my arms as I flew up. Trembling with rage, I seized him round the waist and flung him from me, without looking where I cast him.

His head crashed against the wall, and down he dropped in a heap. Whitesock was plunging furiously at her halter, but became as still as a lamb when she heard my voice, and turned to me, a steady stream of blood trickling from her nostrils. As I caressed her and quieted her there was a clatter of feet behind me, and two or three men came in, attracted by the noise the mare had made.

They picked up their companion and carried him outside, and in a moment I heard his voice. The rattle of his head against the stones of the wall had stunned him for a short time, but now he was telling his story. I entertained no doubt that his story took a turn to his own side, and if I had done so, the faces which looked on the mare and myself from door and window would soon have changed my mind. I ran my hand soothingly over Whitesock's shoulder and reviewed the situation.

The enmity of my uncle and his retainers was making Nant-y-Bryn no pleasant place of refuge. It is true that my heart plucked at me to hold a footing on almost any terms in the place where Enid Vaughan lived, but at terms which did not hold with a gentleman's credit and dignity I could scarcely stand. It was certain that I should become a still keener object of dislike after the tale went about the groom's fellows, of the manner in which I had handled him, and the confusion of languages served his turn and hindered me from putting myself right.

"I must go to Sir Arthur," thought I, "and explain this affair," and I slipped Whitesock's halter so that she was free in her stall. No one would venture to assault her while she was loose, and I went to the house. My uncle had been crossing the courtyard as I went to the stables, but he had avoided speaking to me, and I now sought him

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in his library. I was about half-way down the hall to the door, when a voice which I had difficulty in recognising as Owain's broke out into a shrieking fury of declamation.

"I," the voice screamed, "I—I. A Welsh gentleman of pure descent."

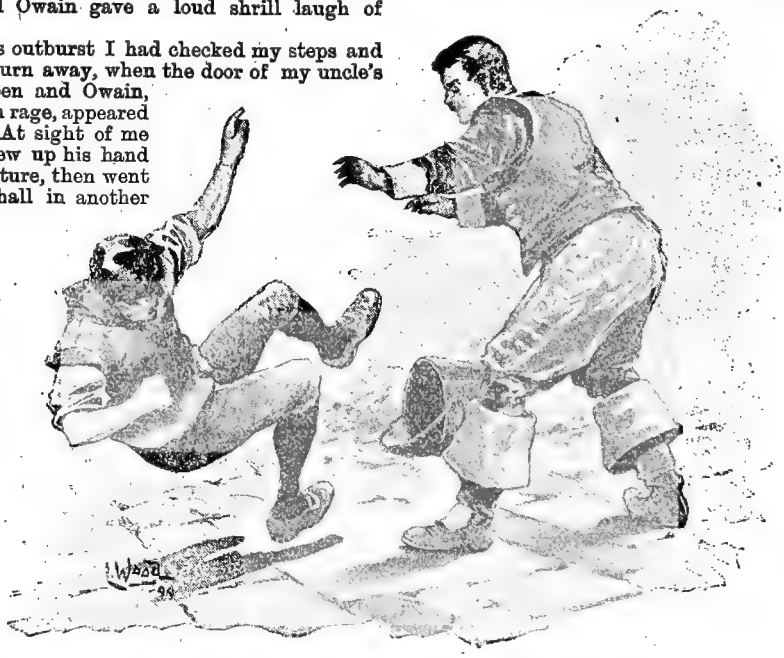
I could almost have smiled, for, whenever Owain was very furious he always stood upon his lineage. But this was no smiling matter. He seemed nearly inarticulate with rage, and was crying out in English, always used in particular conversation as a precaution against servants picking up information:

"You dare to propose this to me? You—you—"

Anger seemed to choke his voice, and there was a soft murmur as of someone else rapidly speaking in a low tone, then the scream broke forth again.

"Other lives to offer as a sop to the authorities? 'Tis blacker and blacker; other traitors! You dare to say the word traitor!" and Owain gave a loud shrill laugh of contempt.

Upon hearing this outburst I had checked my steps and and was about to turn away, when the door of my uncle's room was burst open and Owain, his face flaming with rage, appeared on the threshold. At sight of me he stopped and threw up his hand with a dramatic gesture, then went swiftly across the hall in another direction. Behind him came Sir Arthur, his fingers outstretched, as if to grasp Owain and draw him back, but when he saw me he darted out of sight. It was certainly very awkward to come upon them in the midst of some quarrel, but, as I had shown myself, it seemed to me best to get over with what I had come to say, and I went into the room.



I seized him round the waist and flung him from me.

I found that my uncle had returned to his accustomed seat, and was staring, with shaded eyes, into the fire. I told him plainly what had happened, expecting some petulant outburst; but he heard me without a word. I finished my speech and stood silent, but he neither lifted his head nor spoke. I waited a little while, then left him, and crossed the hall in the direction which Owain had taken. I glanced into the room where meals were spread, and found it empty. A huge turf fire was piled on the wide cavernous hearth, and I walked up to it and stood staring into its glowing depths, pondering over my future movements, when the door opened and someone entered. It was Enid Vaughan. She came towards me with slow, steady step, the firelight shining on her beautiful face, her soft, dark glance meeting mine earnestly and sadly. I bowed, and hastened to draw a chair forward for her, but she stopped me with her hand.

"Master Heathcote," said she, in her low, clear voice, "you must not stay in Nant-y-Bryn. You are in danger here."

"Are we not all in danger?" said I.

"I was not thinking of those wretched creatures who attacked us yesterday," she said. "Surely they received too dreadful a punishment to be dangerous any more. You are in especial danger."

"Not only here, but everywhere else," said I.

Her kind, sweet eyes filled with pity, and she lifted her hand a little, then let it fall again.

"Have you no friend who will shield you—you who have only followed a sacred duty?" said she.

"I came here in that hope," replied I, "but——" I hesitated a moment, and she asked me in her quiet, direct fashion: "Do you feel yourself safe here, Master Heathcote?"

"Frankly," said I, "I do not, Mistress Vaughan. My uncle's bullet skimmed my brain-pan too closely last night for me to feel at ease."

"How do you know it?" cried Enid in a low, eager voice. "Oh, how glad I am to find you warned. I scarce knew how to tell you. But to hear that you know!" She stopped and drew a long sigh of relief.

"I cannot answer clearly for the manner in which it has been impressed upon me," I replied. "I know that I lay down last night too confused to think of anything, and that I woke up firmly convinced that his hand and no other fired the shot."

"Siani saw it all," said Enid Vaughan. "Siani saw him running to the door with a carbine in his hand. Perhaps he meant at first to fire at the enemy. It is certain that he laid the piece deliberately for you."

"I have it now," I answered. "It was his face as he peered into the ditch which has been running through my thoughts and guiding me to a sure end," and I told her of what I had seen.

"Why should he offer to do such a dreadful thing?" she asked. "You, his nearest kinsman, and fighting bravely for him."

"Not for him," said I, "I thought only of your safety."

A faint, beautiful colour rose into her face and she went on. "Siani told me of it last night after I had seen you, and I scarce know what to do. Now she comes with other news, and I dare not let you remain ignorant of your danger. These people would——"

She stopped, and I nodded my head.

"I understand," I replied. "Let him but lift his finger and they——"

I stopped in turn, and she drew a long breath and said "Yes," softly.

"I could not let them mishandle the unfortunate woman, at any rate," said I. "I do not blame myself there."

"Oh, no, no," said she, "poor, unhappy creature. To kill her child before her eyes!" She shuddered, and fell silent.

"And now," said I, "this fellow's broken head will crown my enormities." And I told her of my recent adventure in the stable.

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Her face clouded and she opened and shut her hand nervously.

"They think so little of taking a dreadful revenge for a punishment, even when they are in the wrong," she said.

"I have seen enough of them to be sure of that," I returned, "and there is nothing for it but boot and saddle." The door opened again and Owain came in. He had now regained control over himself, but his countenance was still flushed, and bore traces in the dilated eye and quivering nostril of the recent quarrel in which he had been engaged. He came straight up to us, and leant his arm upon the huge oaken beam which ran across the head of the fireplace.

"Master Heathcote," he said, "have you any other place where you could lie in safety? Because I must tell you plainly, for the friendship I bear you, that you are not safe here."

"Owain!" cried his sister, in astonishment at this confirmation.

"It is too true, Enid," he said, mistaking her surprise. "I would a thousand times that there were no need to give this warning, but there is."

The door opened once more, and Sir Arthur Vaughan came in with soft step and downcast eye. He shuffled up to the fire where we stood, and spread his thin hands to the blaze. His idea, clearly enough, was to be present when Owain and I spoke together; and as we could scarcely make it plain that his presence was not required in his own room, we remained silent. Enid went away at once, and my uncle pursed his lips and stared into the fire reflectively, as if he had merely come to await the meal which was shortly afterwards put on the table. This was dispatched almost in silence, and upon its conclusion I withdrew to my own room, and began anxiously to plan my next steps.

After some thought I resolved to strike across into Herefordshire, where I had friends who would receive me. I had hung in the wind at first between them and Nant-y-Bryn, but had finally chosen the latter as the safer spot.

However, any port in a storm, and I carefully loaded my pistols, took my cloak from the hook where it had been hanging since Siani gave it back to me, and made up my mind to set out that very night. It was clear, hard, frosty weather, a bright moon, and Whitesock had not moved a hoof for a couple of days. We could go far before daybreak, and so much the better, for the roads would be quiet. I had lately ridden much about the surrounding country with Owain, and knew which way to march. I had just made an end of my preparations, when a tap came at the door and Owain himself appeared.

"My dear Heathcote," said he, in a tone of deep vexation, "I am more ashamed than I can tell you of the turn which affairs have taken. It seems traitorous to be glad to see you go—for I perceive your preparations—after the fashion you stood shoulder to shoulder with me last night. But I can only say to you that I am rejoiced that you have put my hint into practical service. I cannot tell you one-tenth of the things I would, for I have bound myself with a vow of confidence, given carelessly, and without dreaming of what it would cover."

"You!" I cried, as he paused; "do not dream for an instant that I could connect you with this awkwardness. I would trust my life in your hands a hundred and a hundred times. But, as you hint, there are other people in the matter, and too many for one to stand against."

"You are only too right," he replied gloomily, "and this, a refuge of a thousand, is denied you."

"Fear nothing for me," I answered. "I shall cross the marshes into Herefordshire, and lie for awhile in quarters as safe as good friends can make them."

His eye brightened, and his brow cleared.

"You have somewhere to go?" he cried. "Heaven be praised! It has lain like lead at my heart to think you must go out into danger alone."

"The danger, I fear, is on your side," said I. "Suppose these savages make another descent upon you. I would give my left hand to be here to help."

"Their sting is drawn," returned Owain. "Eleven slain and some of them, for a surety, wounded. It is more likely that we shall run them to their holes and root out this ancient mischief."

I was about to speak again, when Owain laid a finger on his lips and looked at me with such wide-opened eyes and face of earnest warning that I remained silent. His ears, keener than mine, had caught a sound without, and he made two or three sharp steps in the room as if approaching the door. Then he stopped dead and listened. I listened also and heard nothing save a single, faint creak. Never a sound of a footfall came to my ears, only the give of a board under someone's weight as they sped away. Owain returned to my side.

"I would dispense with a leave-taking of your uncle, if I were you," he said drily, "and, above all, not a word again to me or to anyone else of where you think of going."

I buckled on my sword, and, of set purpose, took out my purse, and ran over the considerable stock of gold it still contained. I knew he had no money to offer to supply me with for my journey, and I knew also that he was troubled because he had not. The sight of my well-filled purse set him at ease, though not a word of it was spoken between us. We went downstairs and out to the stable. Whitesock whinned her shrill delight as I began to prepare her for the road, and Owain helped with a will. I glanced across the courtyard time and again, and at last saw Enid Vaughan standing at the door which led to the hall, and looking across to the building in which we were. I left Owain to lead the mare out, and crossed at once to the young lady.

"And is it good-bye, then, Master Heathcote?" she said. "I fear the remembrance of Nant-y-Bryn will be but a gloomy stain upon your memory. You have been treated——" she paused, and her lip curled in proud shame.

"Oh, no, no," I said, "not you—not Owain. I shall remember every moment I have spent with you as the happiest of my life."

My heart was so full, and she seemed so moved at my going, that I was on the point of uttering my dearest thought, when I checked myself and bit my lips into silence. I had lost the whole of my heart to Enid Vaughan, and loved her as I had never conceived it possible for one human being to care for another. But to say so, I, a fugitive on the face of the earth, what had I to offer? It was for Enid that I was flying again now. If I remained to run the gauntlet of my uncle's ferocious retainers, what chance would remain to me of coming back, mayhap, in more fortunate times to say what I dared not say now?

"You are going into the night," said Enid, "and here, the night is the time of danger."

"I do not fear, indeed," I replied, "with Whitesock under me. Nor do I think that the Red Men of the Dusk will be moving after their late terrible lesson."

There was a rattle of hoofs behind me, and Whitesock, plucking the reins from Owain's loose grip, cantered across the courtyard, and laid her head over my shoulder.

"She will bear me away, now," I said, in a low voice, "but be sure, oh, be sure of this, that should a luckier day dawn for me, she shall carry me swiftly back."

Enid became very pale, but gazed upon me with a clear, steady look in her great, dark eyes. I bent over her hand and kissed it, and in an instant she was gone. No matter, I turned away with a heart full of joy and pride. Upon the truth of that look, my heart was founded as upon a rock.

From door, from window, from porch, curious faces looked out at me as Owain threw open the gate of the courtyard. I held his hand in a firm, warm grip for an instant, then swung myself into the saddle and paced out to the road. We exchanged the barest words of farewell, for there were too many inquisitive ears about to say more, and I rode away from Nant-y-Bryn.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Stolen Letter.

The night was falling fast as I rode slowly down the uneven mountain way, and with every streak that died out of the western sky, the moon brightened and brightened in the east. She was well up, and cast a strong silver light over the thin white mist which clung to the hollows of the hills and lay thicker over the marshy places.

The air was keen and piping, Whitesock moved like music under me, and at twenty-four one's spirits do not naturally fall to the doleful side. I thought sweetly and strongly of the treasure I was leaving behind in Nant-y-Bryn; I caught my breath with a gasp of delight when I recalled the look with which my last words had been received, and I fell to building castles in the air, that pastime dear to young hopes. I was, it may be, three miles from Nant-y-Bryn, when, of a sudden, there burst into my head, like a peal of bells, the words Owain had cried out to my uncle: "Other lives to offer as a sop to the authorities."

Their quarrel was of a surety about myself. What had Sir Arthur been proposing to him? "Other lives!" My heart turned to lead within me, and I drew rein. Whitesock stopped at once, and I tore off my cloak and thrust my hand inside my coat. My heart fell lower, and I stripped off the coat also and laid it on the croup before me; and, with trembling fingers, searched again and again in the secret pocket beneath the arm-pit. It was empty, and I saw what it all meant. I cursed myself for my foolish carelessness, and groaned aloud.

From boyhood I had had two great friends, Roger Brent and John Locking. We had always marched together. We rode south the three of us towards Penonddock. We had all three fought under Sir George Booth at Chester, and run away, still in company. We had all gone into the last affair, and the word I had to fly came from Roger, who had got wind of Sir John Postgate's intentions.

I remembered well the hasty words scrawled on a scrap of paper, and sent by a sure hand. "All is known," he wrote, "and 'off' is the word. I shall get a cast over to Waterford, and lie at the old spot. Jack is riding as his cousin's lackey to Devon. Farewell, dear lad, till better times."

At the time of receiving this letter I had no means of safely destroying it as several people were about, and I had thrust it into the secret pocket of my riding coat, a pocket I had had contrived, in which to carry important papers on a journey. I called to mind how I had blamed Roger in my own thoughts for writing so openly of intended movements, but he was a feather-headed fellow, whom Jock and I both loved, and were continually getting out of scrapes. Yet whom dare I now blame for carelessness when it was borne in on me that I had utterly forgotten to destroy the letter, and it was now gone.

In whose hands was it? I had no doubt at all upon that point. What use would be made of it? I had no doubt there either, and I groaned again. We had been marked men since Winnington Bridge, and short work would be made of us should we fall into the hands of those who held power. All these thoughts, growing thick and fast upon me, threw me into a veritable stupor, and I sat stock-still staring at a great boulder just before me beside a turn of the way.

A bright shining streak thrust itself over the edge of the rock in my direction, and I gazed at it mechanically. Matters remained thus for some moments, when a grim chuckle broke upon my ears, and, with a great start, I came to myself. I was bitterly cold, the mare was shivering in the chill breeze, and the shining streak was the moonlight glinting along the barrel of a carbine pointed directly at my breast. I ran my eye up to the stock and recognised the face peering at me, and an impulse came upon me to speak to him, to anyone, to hear my own voice.

"Ieuan," said I. "Ieuan, I am in a hard place."

"You are meaning, perhaps," said he, "that you fear I am a straight shot."

"Your shot!" said I, feeling all the careless contempt I put into my voice. "If I had no more than that to trouble me, I should be a happier man than I am now."

"Well," said he, "you are a strange young man. But there was something in my heart which said 'no,' when I saw a good chance to shoot you and take the beautiful horse. Will you promise not to ride off, nor to draw a pistol on me if I come to talk with you."

"I will," said I. and he dropped the long carbine he was carrying into the hollow of his arm at once. I flung on my coat again, and drew the left-hand rein.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Back to Nant-y-Bryn," said I.

"Why?" asked Ienan. "And why are you going away?"

I left both questions unanswered. His first question was already one to which I was seeking an answer in my own mind, and I could not give it. To what end should I return? Would Sir Arthur yield up the letter, or confess to any knowledge of it? I knew it was foolishness to expect any such thing, and I halted again in perplexity.

"You have quarrelled with him," said Ieuan sharply. "You are leaving him in anger; you are finding that he iss a bad man."

I nodded, but said nothing.

"What has he taken from you?" next demanded Ieuan. It was clear that he had been watching me since I halted, and his keen wits were threading my actions on the right string.

"A letter," said I; "a letter which I would have given all the world that no one should have seen."

"And can he make a mischief with that letter in Nant-y-Bryn?"

"No," I replied; "but he can put it in the right hands, I fear."

"And where are they?"

"In Worcestershire."

"Then he can do nothing!" Ieuan slapped the stock of his piece triumphantly, and I started once more, as if from a dream, and I began to rub the mist from my wits. His questions had been so jumping with my thoughts that I had answered them half-unconsciously, and now I began to bethink myself where I stood. Here was the fellow whose throat I had done my best to cut last night, putting query after query to me like a father-confessor, and I was giving docile answers. I ran my mind swiftly over what had been said, and found nothing further to reproach myself with; then looked for the first time with clear-seeing eyes at Ieuan Gwyllt. He stood with one hand leaning on the mare's shoulder, his keen, fierce eyes riveted on my face, and reading my thoughts—so keenly intuitive is this race—as a man reads an open page.

"You gave me a chance," said he, "when that woman jumped on my shoulders. I gave you a chance last night and we were level. But you stood by old Megon this morning, and I am thinking of that now. It has held my finger from the trigger, but never mind, let us consider this letter. Can he use it to make a profit to himself?"

"Ay, that he can," said I, as my mind began to sum up things clearly for the first time. I had been so full of thoughts of Enid Vaughan, so occupied with the bustle of things of late, that I had never fairly set myself to working out the meaning of my uncle's conduct. I now saw with what hopes he had launched that bull t at me. Had it been an inch or so lower in its flight, surely an ounce of lead had never been put out to greater interest, for it would have meant his accession to the fair estate he coveted so eagerly; it would have meant safety, wealth, a great posi-

tion, and all secured so easily by the death of one already proscribed, already fugitive. Who was there to inquire, or to care, where or how I had come to my end? And then his peace to be made with the authorities by delivering up my hapless friends. With what patient care must he have searched my clothes while I slept, for I had no other coat, and wore it constantly by day.

"And the letter is of no use to him in Nant-y-Bryn?" went on Ieuan.

"None," said I.

"He must send it or carry it to someone else?"

"He must!"

"And will it be best for him to do that soon?"

I perceived Ieuan's drift, and thought for a moment. Had he already made use of the information? I felt sure he had not. I had gained enough knowledge of the household to be pretty certain that no one had been dispatched since my arrival, and then his fear of reducing the garrison had made in my favour so far. Now his fear would be greatly relieved, and the news was not of a nature to keep. My friends might shift their quarters.

"It will," said I.

"What will the letter do for him?" persisted Ieuan.

"It will furnish him very likely with means to remove from this country," said I, "and place him in safety far from the Red Men of the Dusk."

Ieuan ground his teeth wickedly, and tugged at his great red beard.

"He cannot send it by a bird in the sky," said Ieuan, "and I will make that the only safe way to him."

Here was an unexpected ally, and one of whose power I had no doubt. Ieuan stared thoughtfully along the thread of road running white in the moonlight across the swart moor, for the land on either side was wet peat-bog, where the snow did not lie.

"The moon will not be much higher before we have that paper," he said at last.

"Supposing he comes this way," I returned, following his unspoken argument.

"I have been thinking of that," replied Ieuan, "and he will not come this way. We shall be doing well if we go and place ourselves on the way that he must come."

I was willing enough, and Whitesock wheeled round and trotted directly back, Ieuan loping at my side and talking easily as he ran.

"Will it be Owain who goes?" he asked.

"Never," said I, "never in the world."

"I am glad of that," said Ieuan. "But whoever will go will start on a tall horse for so long a journey as that, and not on a mountain pony. Now for such a horse there is but one road from Nant-y-Bryn."

"Then we must be on it," said I.

"We are too far on it," replied Ieuan; "that is why we are going back. Two miles from the house another little way turns off, and he could go up that."

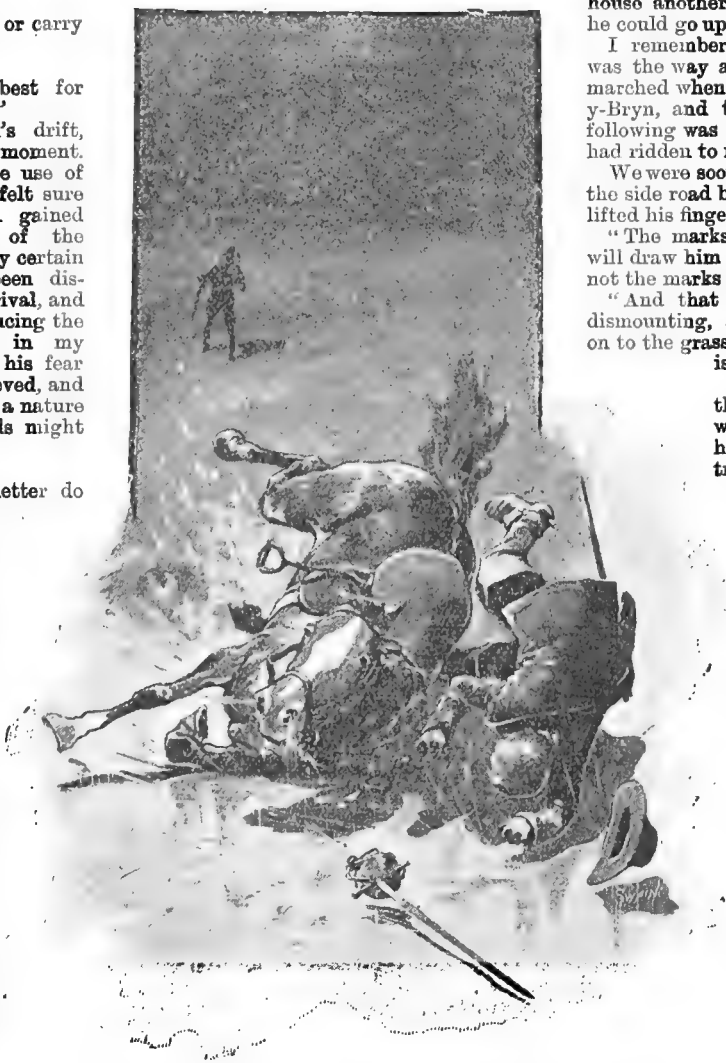
I remembered it as he spoke. It was the way along which I myself had marched when I first approached Nant-y-Bryn, and the track we were now following was the one by which Owain had ridden to meet me.

We were soon near the point at which the side road branched away, and Ieuan lifted his finger for me to draw rein.

"The marks of her feet going away will draw him on," said he, "but not—not the marks of her feet coming back."

"And that is truth," returned I, dismounting, and leading Whitesock on to the grass beside the road. "Here is the place."

Just at the point where the roads forked together was a thicket of mingled hazel and holly, with tracks beaten through it where cattle and ponies had pushed their way. I led the mare into the depths of the clump where the shelter was good, laid my cloak over her loins, and then stepped forward to join Ieuan, who had gone to the further side and was examining the narrow road.



Horse and man rolling over and over in a crumpled heap.

CHAPTER XIV.

It may seem strange that I should have put such instant faith in Ieuan Gwyllt, but so it was, and I marched with him as contentedly and as easy in my mind as ever I accompanied any man. For one thing, I had met him twice at sword-point, and been beaten both times, so that I held him in much respect; and, again, I knew enough of his character from his old acquaintances to be sure that while our interests jumped together his hand would never be turned against me. Further, I was desperate to prevent mischief happening to my friends, and would have ventured upon no small danger to intercept the billet which I was well assured my uncle would dispatch at the earliest possible moment. So I crossed over to him, and peeped over his shoulder at the pathway.

"There iss no sign of man or horse passing," said he, hearing the crunch of my feet on the snowy grass. "But he will come—yes, he will come."

"What makes you so certain?"

"For the same reason, I am sure that someone has already spoken to you," returned Wild John, in his stiff, formal English, "that it iss good to start at once, before the Gwylliard Cochion begin once more to move about the country."

I laughed to see how keenly he summed up things, and he continued:

"How much powder and ball iss with you?"

"Little enough," I answered. "About four charges. I thought it would be enough for the road."

"Little, indeed," said he. "This gun iss loaded, and I have enough to load it once again; that iss all."

"Never mind," said I, "plenty to knock the man's horse from him."

Ieuan turned his head, and bared his strong white teeth in a contemptuous grin. "And do you think," said he, "and do you think we should spend powder on the job? And there is so little with us. Not likely."

"What will you do?" I asked.

"I will show you," he returned; "and it iss time to be about it, too."

He went back through the thicket, crossed the main road twenty yards below the fork, and marched in the direction of Nant-y-Bryn. I followed like his shadow, and two hundred yards or more from the thicket he stopped. We had been moving parallel with the road, but five or six yards from it, out on the wide grassy margin. At the place where we stood the road bed, for some ten or twelve yards, was formed by a smooth sheet of living rock. Such strips are common enough in all that country-side, where the rock crops up in every place, and in wet or slippery weather they demand very wary riding. But, in spite of the snow and frost, the roads were now not slippery, for the skin of snow had fallen on clear, hard, dry earth, and it had never melted, nor was it deep enough to clog a horse or ball under his feet.

I sprang forward and caught his arm.

Ieuan looked round, then went with hasty stride to a black gash in the moor where a turf pit had been opened. Before the frost came on it had been filled with water almost to the brim, and a couple of blows from his heavy heel shattered the ice. He whipped off his hat and filled it with the dark water which came welling up, then ran swiftly to the road and dashed it on the broad riband of smooth rock.

I hastened to help him. Every hatful of water, as it was flung down, spread like a blot, then stood, a hard, black plate of ice. On so bitter a night it froze almost as it fell, and within a quarter of an hour we had a band of ice as hard as iron, and catching the moon like a mirror.

We wrung our hats as dry as we could, then buffeted our hands round our waists to get the life back into the numbed fingers.

"If it iss a mountain pony, it will run over this like a fox," said Ienan, "and then you will have to ride after him and catch him. If it is a tall horse, I will send him down to that ice so that he is most likely to roll in a heap."

"Why," said I, "the fellow will be killed!"

"And a sword?" said Ienan, "a sword and a pistol? Perhaps they do not kill."

"True," said I. "I might have to use rough persuasion."

"He also will have good arms," said Ieuan; "be sure of that. And Gruffydd will use them, too."

"Gruffydd?" I said. "Do you mean that big, dark man with the sword cut on his cheek? Why do you name him?"

"And have you not seen him following that bad old man as a dog follows his master?" demanded Ieuan. "He will come as sure as we stand here."

He turned and went on up the gentle slope which rose from the thicket. The rest of the rise was scarce fifty yards from the spot where the ice-trap lay, and from this point we looked out along a flat, open stretch, lying silent and desolate under the moon.

"I shall jump from behind the bush and try to beat him from the horse with my gun," went on my companion; "but there is no good cover handy, and it is likely I shall miss. Then you must stop in the bottom with your horse, and cut him off if he passes the ice."

"Ay, ay," said I, and beat my hands again, for at present I could handle nothing surely. Then I went back down the hill to look to Whitesock, and found her standing like a lamb under cover of the thick bushes, but making a soft, whinnying noise for joy to see me again. I walked her gently up and down for an hour or more, without sight or sound of anything happening up the hill; then secured her again, spread the cloak carefully over her, and went up the slope.

Just as I neared the top, Ieuan rose out of a patch of brake in which he had settled himself, and I saw his beckoning finger against the sky. I ran at once, and he pointed to the distance. The night was still and windless, and the silence intense. I listened eagerly, yet heard nothing. I shook my head, but Ieuan wagged his shock of hair with the completest confidence, and I bent my ear to its task again. Yes, I had it now. The sound of clinking hoofs, faint and far, and swiftly beating on the iron road.

"I am right—yes, I am always right," said Ieuan softly, as proud as a peacock over the way in which his forecast was coming true. "He iss coming—he iss coming!"

"I will get back to my post," said I, and away I ran down the hill. I led Whitesock to the edge of the bushes and

swung myself into the saddle and waited, with my eye fixed upon the ridge above clear in the moonlight.

The rider was no laggard, for I had been ready but a short time when I heard the clang of hoofs rattling up to the ridge. Suddenly, horse and man shot into sight, and, upon the instant, a dark figure leapt at them with a wild scream. The horseman must have driven his spurs home at the sound, for the swift canter was exchanged for a furious gallop. The big, powerful horse he was riding came down the hill with terrific leaps, bound upon bound, and one of these carried him clean upon the trap of ice. It worked to a miracle. The shoes of the horse were somewhat smooth, as we found afterwards, and shot out from under him like skates, and down he went, horse and man rolling over and over in a crumpled heap. Ieuan had followed hard upon their heels and now ran in and had the horse at once by the head. It got to its feet, trembling but unhurt; the man lay quite still. In a trice Ieuan had secured the horse to a neighbouring bush, and was back at my side, for I had now come up and was turning the man over on his back.

"Gruffydd it iss," said Ieuan. "And where iss the paper?"

"He is not dead," said I, laying my hand on the messenger's heart.

"Dead!" said Ieuan with scorn. "And why should he be dead with falling from a horse? But the senses are out of him, and that is very useful for us."

Without another word he turned to his task, and deftly stripped off the great horseman's coat in which Gruffydd was wrapped. This he tossed aside as a very unlikely place for a letter to be stowed away in. Next came a very thick, woollen doublet, which Ieuan whipped off as neatly, and set about searching. He took his long knife and ripped it here and ripped it there, but no letter came to light, and after a few moments search, he flung that aside also. In a twinkling, and with a dexterity of which I had never seen the like, he had the shirt of Gruffydd off, and in his hands, allowing the naked body of the messenger to fall back upon the icy slab of rock as if he was handling a wooden figure.

At the second cut of the knife, he gave a guttural cry of satisfaction. He had ripped open a small bag-like fold of the shirt, pleated close to the neck, and out came a folded letter. He handed it over to me, and I had it open at once.

I held it up to the moonlight, but could make out nothing. Ieuan had flint, steel, and tinder, and he struck a light. It was all right. We had the letter safe enough. It gave the information which could be gathered from the note of which I had been robbed, and was addressd to Sir John Postgate. No name was signed to it, but an ingenious and complicated device was drawn with a pen. This would serve to prove who had written the letter, since the writer alone would know how it was signed, and yet, should it fall into the wrong hands, no trace of the writer's identity would be furnished.

"This is it," I cried.

"Then there iss with us all we are wanting, and Gruffydd iss of no more use," said Ieuan. He bent over the prostrate, half-naked figure, took a handful of the great black beard in his clutch, and tossed the head back, baring the hairy throat. Upon this naked throat he laid the edge of his keen knife, and, with a turn of his wrist, was about to slit it from ear to ear, when I sprang forward and caught his arm with both my hands, crying: "No, no!"

Ieuan turned his head and looked at me inquiringly for a moment, then rose and thrust his knife into its sheath.

"Yes," said he, "you are right; you are quite right. I am seeing your meaning; if they shall know that Gruffyd is stopped, they shall start somewhere else, and perhaps we are not there to catch that one."

It was clear that Ieuan had not divined the impulse of humanity which forbade me to stand by and see the poor wretch's throat cut for doing his master's errand and bidding; but his keen wits had furnished a reason for not proceeding with the murder of his enemy. What better evidence could be given to Sir Arthur that his mission had failed than the finding of the dead body of his messenger?

"He must be a prisoner with us," said Ieuan, and forthwith began dressing the man again.

Gruffydd came to his senses as Ieuan was fastening his doublet about him, and looked round upon us vacantly, uttering low, uneasy cries. I brought the horse and he was set upon it, after his broadsword and a pair of pistols had been taken from him. Ieuan ripped off a strip of the prisoner's coat with a knife and bound his feet together under the horse, then seized the rein and struck away at once into the moorland.

(To be continued.)

We have seen a Spanish working-men's journal which, below its title, bears the legend, "Published as often as there are funds in hand."

A good-looking girl, whose lover asked her in the tenderest tones why it was that she was so magnetic, explained the phenomenon by informing him that her mother and father were both telegraph operators.

"Pity a poor blind man with a large family!" cried a wayside beggar.

"And how many children have you, unfortunate man?" asked a lady in great concern.

"How can I tell, madam? I can't see 'em."

When someone applied to Lord Melbourne for an order to wear a foreign decoration, he expressed a doubt whether the applicant had established any claim to it. The answer of a friend was:

"The fact is, he is a very dressy man, and would show it off exceedingly well."

First Tramp: "It's harrud to find nice, easy jobs, Bill."

Second Tramp: "You said yestiday you'd got one—nuthin' ter do but sit in an easy chair an' keep still, that's wot the man told you. Why didn't you stay in that soft place?"

First Tramp (dolefully): "That there man was a dentist, and he wanted to 'xperiment with a new tooth pulling machine."

Mrs. Wilton: "I have not heard from your daughter since she married the foreign count."

Mrs. Bilton: "She is very unhappy."

Mrs. W. "Too bad; but such matches usually are unfortunate."

Mrs. B.: "Indeed they are. You see the poor girl knows so little of foreign languages that she drops back into English every time she gets angry, and then her husband can't understand a word she says."

An amateur is discussing with a dealer the price of a set of old china.

"But," says he, "it's too dear. There is not a piece in the set that has not been broken and mended."

"Why, sir," says the dealer, "that is what makes its value." Then, slowly and impressively—"That is the set Napoleon dashed to the floor when he was enraged at the defection of Bernadotte."

"Dear me! Is that so? Are you certain of it?"

"Positive—perfectly sure. But if you prefer it intact, I have the same set unbroken."

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The Murder Room.

I AM an excessively nervous person and subject to impressions. Not weak—oh! certainly not that! Have I not shown how I can cling to a purpose? But I am susceptible to surrounding influences, and so sensitive that an atmosphere has power to inspire or depress, a personality to charm or antagonise, and an idea, suggested with sufficient force, to control me.

Lenore and I were perfectly happy together, though no one had wanted her to marry me.

"He has strange ways," her friends said. Lenore had told me this and thrown back her pretty head and laughed at them as she clung to my neck. She loved me always.

We had been married about six months when we began to look for a house. It was great fun, Lenore said, to tramp round together and plan and discuss; but it was a long time before we found anything at all satisfactory.

We exhausted the lists offered by real estate offices, and one afternoon were walking to our hotel, somewhat discouraged, when we passed a pretty little place, marked conspicuously "To Let."

The gate leading into the really large garden swung open at a touch, and we walked round the house examining as well as we might from outside its walls. It was not a modern house.

It was rather low, of one storey, but well finished, with wide porches and big square windows. The shutters of one were half opened, and Lenore pushed them apart and we peered into a small room with shelves running along one wall.

"There is my library," I said, but Lenore exclaimed:

"Why, there is no door in the room!"

"You are mistaken," I cried, looking in again, but though we could see every point of the room clearly, there was no egress apparent but the window through which we gazed.

"It is very strange," Lenore whispered, and her form trembled. "It rather frightens me, Basil," she added half apologetically.

I laughed at her foolish terror, and soon she laughed herself, and by the time we reached the hotel we had decided to get the keys from the agent whose address was given on the bills.

I went alone to see this man the next day. He was a gentlemanly person, whose occupation was not determined by any evidences thereof about his office. He looked curiously at me as I spoke with some enthusiasm of the house, and upon my questioning him he replied that it was his own property. He would go with me, he said, to look over it.

The entrance was exceptionally good, and the hall, running directly through the centre of the house, wide, handsomely panelled in oak and lighted from the roof. There were pretty drawing-rooms, dining-rooms and bedrooms, and no evidence anywhere of the small apartment which we had inspected from the garden.

I spoke of this immediately, and the landlord seemed embarrassed and anxious to avoid my questions. We were just leaving the house, and with some little hesitation he finally asked me to go back to his office; he would tell me there, he said, about this room.

"The price at which I offer you this house," he began, "is singularly low, and, frankly, there is a good reason for it. I have never explained the peculiarity of that room to anyone, because in itself it has always proved sufficient grounds for tenants to reject the house at any price. But the place pleases you and"—here he spoke slowly—"you do not seem a person to be easily frightened. That room has been the scene of several murders."

Naturally I started, but before I could speak he repeated harshly:

"Several murders. This was of course generally known at one time. But the house has been unoccupied for years, the neighbourhood has changed, and the stories about it have gradually been forgotten. For the last tenant I had the room walled up; under the circumstances he did not care to use it. There was something strange about him, too——"

He stopped abruptly, putting the key of the house in my hand, and in spite of what I had heard I accepted it, and promising an answer that day, went slowly back to the hotel.

My desire for the place had somewhat cooled, though I said to myself that I was not superstitious. I should not tell Lenore its strange story—she was so easily disturbed. It was a charming house, and very reasonable. Why not make some excuse to my wife for the sealed room, and, asserting my strength of character, move into the place and build over this grave of many tragedies the happiest of homes?

The sun was bright—the world looked gay. Lenore met me with an expectant face, and the cry:

"Now, Basil, do not say the rent was too high," and smiling at her eagerness, I felt my last doubt melt away before the brightness of her manner, and that afternoon I took from the landlord a lease of the house for twelve months. I told Lenore that the last tenant had been a sort of crank, who having some association with this library had walled it up.

"There is room enough for our present family, little wife," I said, my conscience pricking me for this first deception; and I added, kissing her, "We will open this room, and even add more rooms to the house, if necessity demands."

We moved into our new house, and a week's delightful labour made of it a home as fair as if no black history were hidden beneath its decorations.

"And now," said Lenore, "after the hall we have nothing more to do to this house but to live in it."

We had left the hall until the very last, as one eats a dainty dessert. It had possibilities, with its fine panelling, its big fireplace, and roof of stained glass, and we had some curios in the shape of arms to hang above the mantel-shelf, and one or two bits of rare and valuable old pottery for the panels on either side of the drawing-room door.

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I went out late in the day and met Bronson, an old chum.

"Come home to dine, old fellow," I cried. "Come and see the housekeeping."

He put me off gravely, and said:

"Basil, I must speak to you of something—of this very housekeeping, in fact. Come to my rooms, where we can have a word alone."

I followed him, startled and disturbed. He came directly to the point—he is always direct, Bronson is.

"Have you heard any queer stories about your house?" he asked, and I answered hesitatingly: "Yes," though I tried to seem bluff.

"And are you indifferent?" he asked again, anxiously.

I determined to be quite frank with him—his friendship for me deserved this—and I told him Lenore was ignorant of everything, and that I thought prejudice of this sort absurd.

He interrupted me quickly.

"A prejudice! If it were but that! But the circumstances connected with the death of the last tenant were foundation for something more than prejudice. Only that no direct proof against him could be found, the man who owns the property would have swung for it, and even now, after six years, a reward is offered for any clue to the affair."

He must have seen my utter bewilderment in my face for he continued rapidly:

"The strange room in your house has always been sealed, yet the last tenant was found there dead. The body was removed through the window. The man had been murdered, evidently, by whom, for what purpose, has never been discovered."

My heart sank. What mystery had I wilfully brought into my daily associations? Why, above all, had my landlord lied to me about the sealing of this room? And yet, even at this moment, I felt an indefinable reluctance to give up the house. I could see Lenore flitting through the pretty rooms, the little conservatory, with its delicate ferns and miniature fountain.

She was waiting for me now, perhaps, in the hall we were to put the last proud touch upon this very evening. With a short laugh I broke off my reflections.

"Bronson," I cried, "no more ghost stories."

He looked at me sadly and suddenly putting his hand on mine he said: "Do not risk Lenore."

Truly, Bronson sometimes exceeded the limits of our intimacy. He refused to go home with me, and Lenore and I dined alone.

Immediately afterwards we began to work. I fastened a bracket securely in one of the panels, and changing the position of my ladder I held out my hand for some Japanese weapons.

"Let us cross them here," I said.

"They are in the other room," replied Lenore, running to get them, and absently I tapped the panel before me with the hammer. At first I did not notice that it moved, but suddenly I became aware that with the jar it was gradually slipping aside.

Greatly excited, I pushed it, and, as I had expected, it disclosed the dark interior of the sealed library. Lenore was coming and, yielding to a sudden impulse to conceal from her my discovery, I slipped the panel back in its place.

Taking the swords from her I held them against the wall. Fearing to fasten them there, I said: "Stiff, rather, isn't it? The panel is handsome enough without them."

And Lenore, who thought always as I thought, agreed.

That night while my wife slept I went softly from the room and down the hall. Lighting a lamp, I made my investigation as quietly as possible, found the movable panel, and in a few moments stood in the room where the murders had been committed.

Except for its associations the room was commonplace enough, papered with a cheap paper of Continental design, and otherwise of a pattern that compared unfavourably with the rest of the house.

I placed the lamp in my hand upon the shelves which were moved aside with the panel. They concealed the entrance to the room, I supposed, when in place, and mechanically I pushed them back.

Instantly I realised the folly of what I had done. I remembered the mystery surrounding the room—the number of murders committed there—the fact that no motive had been discovered for the last murder. Bronson had said the body bore no marks of violence.

If it had been but a supposed murder? Others might have found this room, incarcerated themselves, died by starvation, by shutting off all exit as I had done!

In the frenzy which seized upon me, I forgot the window near at hand, forgot that a cry would easily bring assistance. I threw myself violently against the shelves, which slid beneath my weight so rapidly that the lamp was knocked from its place and fell with a crash, fortunately extinguished by the swiftness of descent. Breathless and terrified I sprang into the hall.

Closing the panel I hurried to my room and bent over my wife's bed. She moved, unclosed her eyes, and seeing my face near her own, smiled and fell asleep again.

I lay down beside her and tried, myself, to sleep. Impossible! The memory of my terror possessed me still, though its cause had been but a shadow, and I trembled and shivered with the dread that had been upon me.

Then I began to ponder over the murders. What had been the mysterious history of the last? Why had they all been committed in this one room? And so I tormented myself with futile questioning until the dawn, when I arose, haggard and wearied, and went out into the garden before Lenore had awakened.

Even there the fascination held me, and I spent the hour before breakfast pacing backwards and forwards in front of the window which opened from the library, pausing occasionally to look through it, wondering how and why the murders had been committed there.

Suddenly a thought came to me, and though at first I put it away, it returned and forced other thoughts aside, until at last I gave it place, and before I had left my home that day it had grown into a determination.

I was a lawyer and had already won some distinction in my profession. Why not make it my business to find the clue to this mysterious murder? Who could have a better opportunity than I, beneath the very roof—in possession of a secret entrance to the room evidently unknown to others—with good reasons to suspect the landlord who had deceived me?

The reward was large—such a case meant a reputation. I would do this, I said to myself very quietly. Time for the world to know when I could tell it everything.

All day I questioned widely but cautiously, and by night I was in possession of all facts known to the general public. They convinced me that whatever key to the mystery existed lay in that room. I must examine it thoroughly, and this must be done at night, when Lenore was asleep, as I wished her to remain in ignor-

ance of the whole matter. With this in view, I discouraged the visits of all friends lest they spoke of the mystery connected with our house, and Lenore, who cared only to please me, gave everyone up.

I also discontinued all newspapers, fearing that even at this late day some allusion to the murder might appear.

Lenore rarely went out now except into the garden, and to-day I can smile and congratulate myself on the way in which I made everything subservient to what grew to be the great purpose of my life.

We retired early. Lenore slept at all times like a tired child, and I was enabled to begin my work of investigation in good season, between eleven and twelve o'clock at the latest. I had lost all terror of the room itself by this time, regarding it, of course, in a professional light, as part of the business in hand.

My one fear was of being discovered at work or even suspected of it. I had the shutters nailed closely shut, "to prevent curious prying," I explained to Lenore, and clinging fondly to me, she had said she was glad; the thought of the room troubled her.

"I would like our home to be free and open, as it is happy, Basil," she said; "free, open, and happy as our lives"; and I, who had long ago become reconciled to the daily deception, hugged myself in real delight at this proof of her perfect trust and the safety of my secret. I had carried into the room a heavy blanket, which I fastened by strong pins over the window in order to conceal all light within the room from the garden.

I had determined to examine closely every bit of woodwork about the library, as the movable panel suggested to me the probability of further peculiarities of a like nature, and I naturally began with the shelves. On the first two I had found nothing whatever, and owing to the necessity for precaution and silence, I worked but slowly, and I had now wasted fully a week. I did not permit myself to be discouraged. I have never been that.

It was as I bent down to examine the third shelf that I became suddenly conscious of observation. That eyes were upon me, I was absolutely sure, but for some strange reason I could not determine from what point of the room I was being observed.

How they seemed to burn into me! They were moving now—they were coming nearer—I could feel their position change. Ah! why could I not define it? and suddenly I felt they were above me, and I knew them, too, that they were Lenore's. I sprang erect to face her where she stood above me!

She was not there!

Baffled, infuriated, I looked round the empty room. That Lenore, of whose profound ignorance of my project I had been so foolishly certain—that my wife, of all others, should have dared to spy upon me! The thought was maddening, the more so that she had so easily escaped my just resentment. She must have gone as she had come, through the panel! How had she opened it while I was at work upon the shelves? How had she closed it so quickly, so softly?

I hastened to my room. I found my wife lying, almost as I had left her, on the bed—her arms flung carelessly above her head. Such slender, delicate arms Lenore had! A little smile was on her lips. What could I think? I believed her so incapable of deception, and I was obliged to persuade myself that after all I had been quite mistaken. But I was unfitted for work, and irritated and disturbed, I threw aside the dressing-gown in which I worked, and went to bed.

All night I lay awake thinking of my great scheme and the fame it would bring me, and though I had tried to check it, a great anger against Lenore took possession of me. I said to myself that nothing could be more annoying than such an interruption. Suppose I had been on the point of discovering something of great importance in the case, and I felt as if in some way I must vent my vexation. I clenched my hands and tossed on the bed until I succeeded in waking my wife.

As she unclosed her large eyes I bent over her and said harshly, "Why did you leave your bed to-night?"

She seemed for a moment bewildered, and then, nestling to my side, she said, "Basil, you are dreaming."

Whether she were deceiving me or not, I felt silence were best, and putting her from me for the first time in our life together, I turned my face away, and, after a long time, fell into a broken and troubled sleep.

At last I dreamt of being engaged in some secret study of vast importance. Aiming repeatedly at a decisive point, I was each time interrupted, and the result of my researches snatched from me. Ever the same one who disturbed me, and ever eluded detection.

Gradually, throughout the dream, my identity changed. I became the owner of the house in which I lived; the spy, who so persistently annoyed me, was the murdered tenant. His murder suggested itself as the only way of freeing myself from him—it seemed excusable, even justifiable, and the work which before had engrossed me for itself became now the means by which I might detect this person in his infamy and punish him.

My opportunity came. At last I saw him! I had him in my grasp; he struggled; my fingers closed about his throat——

I awoke shrieking, "I have found the clue."

It was broad day, my wife stood beside me and passed her hand across my eyes.

"You are ill, dear," she said gently.

It was with difficulty I replied, the impression of my dream was so strong upon me. It moreover suggested a line of thought which seemed to me reasonable, and I longed to be alone to follow it out to what I was sure would be the true solution of the mystery of the murder.

I reassured Lenore. I had only had a bad dream, I said, and she hung over me with pretty fondness as I ate my late breakfast, and I could show no anger towards her. But from that moment I suspected her, and she was never the same to me afterwards.

As I went off to the office I summoned up my thoughts in this way. The landlord of the house had some occupation which he carried out in private. This I had learnt from Bronson. I also learnt that the last tenant, having no family, had let a room to the owner of the property—which fact led to his being suspected of having something to do with the murder.

There was now no doubt in my mind but that he had made use of the sealed library for purposes known only to himself; that the tenant had discovered this and the entrance to the room. Being curious, he had probably watched the man at work, who became conscious, as I had done, of the disturbing influence. He had doubtless been goaded, as I in my dream, into murdering his persecutor.

The whole case appeared clear to me. Now to find out what object carried the man into the library.

So engrossed had I become in this process of investigation that my daily business became impossible, and I found it necessary to leave my office. My days were spent in making researches into cases of a mysterious character.

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People began to look at me askance.

I now passed nearly the entire night in the library. I had conceived the idea that something was buried beneath it, and examining the floor by the aid of a strong glass I had deciphered the marks 7x10.

This greatly elated me. It is true they may have been figures left there by builders, but instinct whispered they were of importance. I secured the necessary tools and began to take up the floor at the point where I saw the figures.

Again I felt that I was being closely observed. I raised my eyes. They fell upon the shelves pushed aside, leaving a wide opening into the hall. I could never have been so forgetful—someone had passed through it.

With a furious cry I bounded into the hall. It was empty and dim. Vanishing through the door of my sleeping room I fancied I saw the edge of a white gown—a woman's night-dress.

I stood within the bedroom. Lenore lay quietly sleeping. My brain boiled at her duplicity. Seizing her by the arm I shook her roughly. "Where have you been?" I cried, as she started up in the bed.

So dead with sleep she feigned to be that she did not know what question I had put to her, but she seemed very frightened and began to cry nervously. I swore to myself that she should not out-do me in cunning, and I soothed her tenderly, saying that she had called out in her sleep and alarmed me.

That she was awake long afterwards I could tell by the restless play of her fingers on the coverlet, her half smothered sighs and restless turning. I felt as if I could kill her, and at last sleep mercifully soothed me into unconsciousness.

I succeeded the next night in removing quite a portion of the floor. In obedience to the figures I cut seven inches in one direction and ten in the other.

The night was oppressively hot and my stooping posture wearisome to a painful degree. I was obliged to pause repeatedly because of a peculiar sensation in my head.

This had, at about this time, given me great annoyance. It was not a pain. It was a sort of rushing blinding feeling—a feeling of being suffocated by great pressure on the brain. It has never left me. To-night it has been even worse than usual. On the evening of which I am speaking I suffered greatly from this trouble, and was also much annoyed by the fear of observation. My previous experiences had made me nervous.

I made strenuous efforts to conquer such a condition, as it seriously interfered with my work. I cannot tell you the number of times I started up, glancing in every direction, expecting to see my wife's dark eyes upon me. I had learnt to hate the look in them, though it was full of tenderness for me. I think I would have ended it all then, had I been sure.

At length, nearly perishing with fatigue, I lifted the piece of flooring, and to my intense excitement I saw imbedded in the earth beneath a small piece of iron. It might have been the corner of a box buried there or a portion of some iron instrument.

I could not move it, and forgetful of the exhaustion which a moment before had overpowered me, I rapidly began sawing the wood round where the bit of iron lay. I could scarcely control my fingers; they shook with nervousness. Several times I laughed aloud in delight, forgetting that I was not alone in the house—that prudence and silence were one. This thought suggested itself later, and a terrible dread came upon me that I had been overheard.

I fancied that Lenore's eyes were once more fastened upon me. I feared to turn my head, and crouched yet more closely to the floor. I could not rid myself of the idea, and, with a great effort, I finally lifted my face and cautiously surveyed the room.

As usual, I saw nothing, and I returned to my work. No sooner had I done so than I felt certain she stood behind me—I could feel her eyes, like coals, burning down into my brain; they were coming nearer—nearer. Fainting with terror of them, I yet summoned courage to confront them, and slowly I turned my face towards them. They were not there!

Again and again this dreadful mockery repeated itself until I was wild with rage and fear and disappointment. Great drops of perspiration rolled from my face, my hands were shaking so that I could not hold the saw.

And then I heard a sound behind me. Motionless, on my hands and knees, I waited. It was a pushing sound; it was, I knew, the panel being opened. It was followed by a rustling and a smothered, startled cry, and then my wife's awful eyes were there, eating into my very soul.

I could not rise to my feet—the rage which took possession of me made me powerless, then came the triumph of having at last detected her.

But perhaps she had already discovered the clue—she would take it from me—I uttered a cry of agony as I saw my cherished plans thus shattered before me and, with a cry, I faced her.

Yes, it was Lenore! She leant against the opened panel, white, shaking with terror, no doubt of being found there. She had on but her night-dress, and her feet were bare on the dark floor. Her black hair lay on her shoulders and against her uncovered neck.

I sprang towards her, and there, in the soft, warm flesh, where the dress had fallen away, I fastened my fingers.

She made no sort of cry or struggle, but into her eyes came the look—ah, I knew it well. Had I not felt it upon me again and again though it had always before escaped my eyes? No love for me, no trust in me, expressed in it, only wild, fearful questioning. Still it confronted me, and though I closed my fingers yet more closely, until her white face was no longer white, and all expression had gone from it, the look was still in her eyes.

And I could not, with all my strength, crush it out. It was there when I laid her on the floor, and I turned her face downwards so that I might see it no longer, and then I seemed to know how it was peering down into the earth to find my secret.

* * * * *

And now I am kept here, in this small cage, where I see no one but a gruff, surly person who brings me indifferent food and leaves my questions unanswered.

I am very patient—patient and quiet. I am only waiting a little while until they shall have taken Lenore away from that room, and then I can go back to the proofs that are waiting there for me.

There is only this man now to annoy me. I hate him. He never takes his eyes from me—he is watching, always watching, and there is something in his look that reminds me of Lenore.

Wilfred Nathan.

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AN ORIGINAL GIRL.

It is "steamer day" at Nassau. If Nassau, like most other civilised places in the nineteenth century had telegraph, or even daily mail communication with the rest of the world, "steamer day" would not mean so much as it now does to its inhabitants and visitors.

The passengers land. Waiting friends rush forward to greet some; others walk through a row of curious faces on either side and up towards the hotel. Small darkies rush about and besiege them with all manner of requests: "Carry your bag, boss?" "Drive for you, boss?" "Does you want a boy, lady?"

By noon the excitement had moderated, and we strolled down to the wharf and pitched silver coins into the clear water thirty feet deep, to see small negroes dive and bring them from the white sand bottom where they lay clearly visible.

I strolled away from my companions, and, passing several small schooners laden with sponges, lying along the wharf—each with two or three ragged children, a negro or two, and perhaps a sallow-faced, scrawny white man, lounging or chewing sugar cane—I came to one cleaner looking than the rest. She was built as all the Bahama schooners, with fine clipper bows, a rounded stern, and small masts and spars. She was neatly painted, and on her stern were the words "Lillian," with her home port, "Watlings Island."

As I stood looking at her, suddenly a young woman came up the companion way and said:

"Good-day."

"Good-day," I answered, "you've come some distance, have you not?"

"Yes," she replied, "from the furthest of the out-islands. I suppose you're from across the sea."

To my affirmative reply, she to my surprise said:

"And how was Irving's Faust? I should so dearly love to see Ellen Terry as Marguerite."

After a moment's pause, during which time I vainly sought to fathom in my mind how a woman on a Bahama Island schooner could have followed London theatrical matters so closely, I gave her my unbiassed opinion of the matter. She was then silent, and I meanwhile had an opportunity to study this Bahama curiosity.

She was about twenty-six years old and was neatly dressed in an inexpensive light material. Her luxuriant hair, of a dark brown colour, was tastefully arranged, and she wore a large-brimmed, but not unbecoming, straw hat, which had evidently seen better days. Although much burnt, I could see her skin was fair and her hands delicately formed. Her expression was one of demure sadness, and after my study I came to the conclusion that she was a more than an ordinarily handsome woman. I decided to continue the conversation.

"May I come aboard?" I ventured to say.

"Certainly," was the reply, "John's gone out to the steamer and I'm keeping watch for him. I should be glad to have you tell me the news. We get little except when we come to Nassau."

"Who is John?" I wondered, "and how much news can people get who only rely on Nassau for it?"

I stepped on board, however, and my fair hostess, excusing herself for a moment, stepped down into the cabin and returned a moment after with two small chairs, which she placed under a small awning which shaded half the cockpit.

She motioned for me to be seated, and I obeyed. There was silence for a moment after we sat down and then my hostess said, speaking very slowly and with evident effort:

"You must think it very strange that I spoke to you and have allowed you to talk to me, but I saw you were a gentleman, and I do grow so lonely and so anxious to see and talk with someone from the great world now and then. The ladies up at the hotel, if I go up there, I do not know, and I suppose I seem queer to them, for they look askance at me, and I haven't the courage to speak to them. John is always so busy when we're here, and besides, John doesn't seem to care for anything but sponges and salt and wrecks."

"Sponges and salt and wrecks?" I asked myself. "What manner of man may John be?"

"Yes," continued my hostess. "it's very lonely on Watlings. You see there are only 675 people on the whole island, and of these only about 300 are white, while I don't suppose there are forty I know. We're 180 miles from Nassau, and although I'm always teasing John to bring me over here, he won't come but three times a year, unless there's a wreck."

"A wreck?" I asked.

"Yes," she went on nonchalantly, "we don't have much luck now-a-days.

"We haven't had a good wreck since the big Spanish steamer went on Eleuthera three years ago."

The situation dawned. My fair friend was the wife, daughter, or sister of a Bahama wrecker—perhaps a pirate.

"What's the matter? You seemed disturbed."

I murmured in a rambling way something about wrecking being a pleasant occupation.

"Oh, I see," and she laughed, and a wonderfully musical laugh it was too. "You are shocked at John's being a wrecker. John doesn't really wreck ships. He merely helps to strip them when they are wrecked."

I felt relieved, but dire memories of childhood tales of false lights and murdered crews, would come in my mind.

"And who is John?" I asked.

"Ah, John is the dearest, sweetest, noblest fellow living—that's John. I'm sure you'd like him."

I tried again.

"Were you born on Watlings?"

"Oh, dear, no. I was wrecked there. Wasn't it romantic to be wrecked on the island Columbus first landed on?"

I mildly remarked that I had been taught Columbus first landed on San Salvador or Cat Island.

"Oh, my, no. You're quite wrong. It's been proved he first came ashore at Watlings. Why, I often, on fine mornings, get John to drive me over to the south-eastern point of the island where it is thought he came ashore. There's the loveliest white beach there, and the broad blue ocean stretches out and away before you as you look eastward. I make John go away, for John isn't romantic, you know, and then I sit down and close my eyes and I see the queer old-fashioned ships with their worn sails, their high stern and the royal banners waving, tossing at anchor beyond the reef; I see the line of boats with flashing oars advancing; I see the dusky Indian forms standing at the edge of the wood, and just above where the surf breaks on the beach I see the old mariner kneel under the banner of Spain, his sword uplifted and his eyes raised to Heaven.

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"Oh, it's a glorious picture, and I never tire of calling it forth. Life on Watlings you see, has its compensations."

As the woman told this story, she unconsciously acted it out, rose from her chair, and with flaming eyes and cheeks, a new and fair Columbus led a fancied band. I had grown deeply interested and I determined to know her history.

"Tell me about yourself," I said, "and how it comes that you, with your evident education and accomplishments, choose to live on a place so remote and lonely as Watlings Island."

She blushed a little, was silent a moment, and then in a low voice said:

"Well, I don't mind telling you. It's not a long story. I see I've given you a wrong impression, for, indeed, although it is lonely at times, I'm really very happy and I wouldn't change places with any woman. I am an English woman, and I was born near London. My father was a civil engineer in good circumstances, and with a twin sister I had every possible advantage of education. My mother died when I was about fifteen and as we had no near relatives we were much with our father. We were near enough to London to run in of an evening to the theatres and the opera; we had a pleasant society of our own; we read much, sang and played a good deal, and rode continually.

"Ten years ago last autumn my father met with a sudden business reverse. He was offered a remunerative post in California, and decided to go there. A ship belonging to a friend of his was just about to sail for the Isthmus; we were offered a passage on her at a low rate, and in three days' time found ourselves at sea. I needn't tell you of the voyage. It was all new and strange to us, of course, and we two girls were the pets of the ship.

"I saw with relief my father, who had broken much under his losses, improve in health and spirits, and as we neared the tropics the glowing sunset skies were emblematic of our hopes of life in the new world.

"We had been out some thirty days when one afternoon as the sun set in a dark bank of clouds and the air was close and sultry, I noticed the Captain looked anxious and heard him say something about the 'Bahama reefs' to the mate.

"That night a hurricane struck us and for hours we were in what seemed a dull grey cavern of water and sky. The ship plunged madly before the gale, and with our father we sat in the cabin, clasped in each others arms.

"The morning broke scarce less dark than the night. Suddenly the wind shifted and the ship righted and seemed to stand quivering, like an over-driven horse. A few minutes passed when, with a wild roar, the storm was on us once more, and we drove madly in another direction. There was a sudden crash, my father sprang, half dragging us toward the companion-way. I saw a huge wall of water rolling down upon us—it fell and all grew dark. I remember a sensation of sinking, of being whirled round, a dull, booming noise in my ears, and I opened my eyes to find myself lying on a sandy beach two rough men looking down on me, while a third and younger one, kneeling beside me, was chafing my hands. Frightened, but too weak to scream, I feebly said:

"'Where am I?'

"'On Watlings Island, Miss,' said the young man.

"'Yes,' said one of the older men, 'and a narrow squeak you had for it, too. If I hadn't thought it was mighty queer seaweed washing in over yon reef, you wouldn't have been talking now.'

"'Where's my father?' I said.

"'With all the rest,' was the reply.

"'Hush!' said the younger man, 'see how weak she is?'

"Then I fainted.

"I woke to find myself on a rude cot in a small cottage, tended by a negress who only spoke a Spanish patois. The wreckers, for such they were, had carried me there. The sun was shining brightly and the storm was over. Days passed, and when I could go about I learnt that I had been the only one saved of the entire barque's crew. The wave that had engulfed her and drowned all but myself had washed me over the coral reef on which the barque had struck. The wreckers on the shore had seen me, and daring the waves, high even between the reef and the shore, had rowed out and rescued me just as I was sinking.

"Utterly crushed as I was, I did not at first realise my position. I was told I could go to Nassau on a schooner in about a month, but I felt no inclination to do aught but stay where fate had thrown me. The young wrecker was very kind to me.

"Meanwhile I grew well and strong in the soft warm air and under the tropic skies. I learnt to like the wild life, and the few white people and all the negroes half worshipped me. One day a schooner brought some papers, and I read our barque had been given up as lost and my name was among those drowned. These papers recalled me to myself and I determined I would go to Nassau, and if I could, thence to England.

"I told the young wrecker, who had become my firm friend and companion, and whom I had taught to read, of my decision.

"'Well, Miss,' he said, 'if you feel it is so, I suppose you're right, but I hate to think of losing you.'

"This and his evident sorrow touched me, and made me think whether in the world to which I was returning I would find such simple, loyal devotion as had here been mine. When the day came for my departure all the inhabitants turned out to bid me farewell. A queen could not have had a more loyal leave-taking than the 'English Miss,' as they called me. The young wrecker went with me. He said he had business in Nassau. That night—a night so soft and sweet it seemed as if storms had never brooded there, the Southern Cross blazing low on the horizon—the wrecker came to where I sat on the deck of the little schooner.

"'Miss,' he said, 'I am nothing but a "Conch," a poor, ignorant Bahama native, but I can't bear to have you go away. We all love you, and I more than all. I must tell you. You know our life is poor and rude that we are far away from the world, but if you won't blame me for even daring to hope, Miss, you know I have the handsomest schooner of the Watlings fleet and the best cottage on the island. I am sure I'd do my best to make you forget your troubles, Miss, and the sponge fishin' is better, Miss, and there's a good many wrecks yet, Miss—and I love you, Miss.'"

Here she stopped and checked herself and blushed.

"Of course you spoke kindly to him," I said, "and told him you were sorry, but he mustn't speak again——"

"Of course I didn't. You're like all men. What's the name of this schooner?"

"Lillian," I replied wonderingly.

"Well, that's my name, and here," as a tall, broad-shouldered, roughly-dressed young man appeared on the wharf, a bunch of roses in his hand, and eyed me curiously, "here's my wrecker, and his name is John."

Ronald Bateman.

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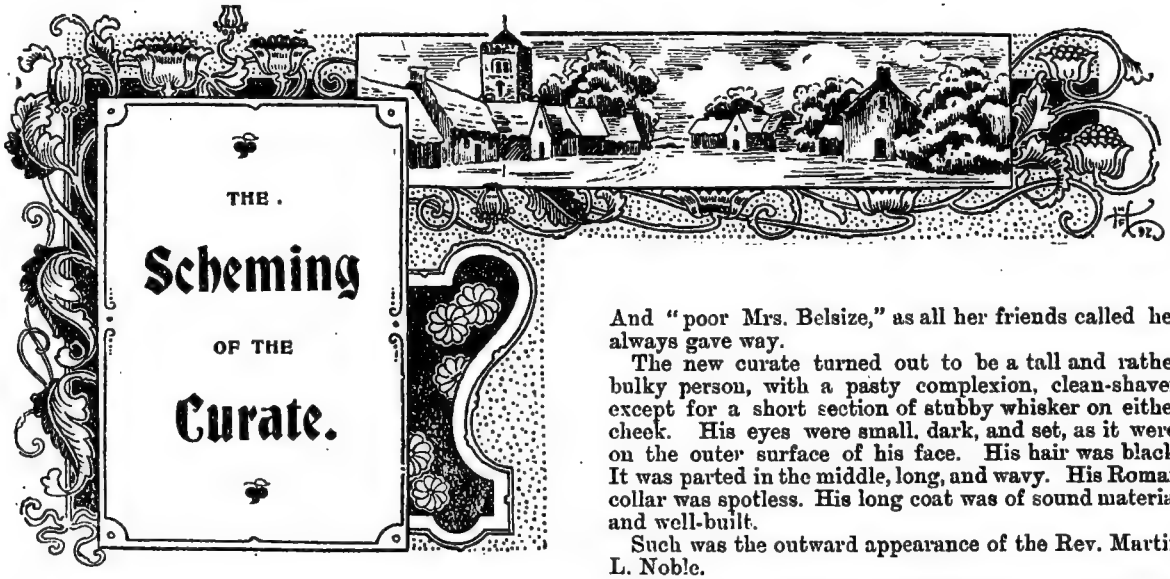

THE Scheming OF THE Curate.

"I DO hope he will be a gentleman, my dear," said the rector's wife to her sister-in-law, with a look of anxiety.

"Whom do you mean, Jane?" asked Miss Belsize, in her peculiar bass tones.

"The new curate, of course. Have you forgotten? He is coming to dinner to-night."

"Oh! Anybody else coming?"

"No.'

"Then I should say the joint will be enough," returned Miss Belsize with a meditative air. "You won't want any side-dishes."

Mrs. Belsize bit her lip, but made no reply. She thought of asking sarcastically how many potatoes she ought to provide, and only refrained because she was at heart afraid of her sister-in-law. The Rev. Charles Belsize, rector of Bedminton, was himself afraid of his sister Elizabeth. So were a good many people whose fate brought them into contact with that lady.

The rector's sister was just forty-two, and she was "rather plain"— that is to say, she had a large aggressive nose, a long upper lip, a sallow complexion, and a trifling hirsute appendage which was not an adornment. She lived permanently at the rectory; the reason being that a large part of her little fortune had been expended in helping to purchase the Bedminton living, on the tacit understanding that she would make the parsonage her home.

The Belsizes, it may be observed parenthetically, were of good family, being, in fact, second cousins of the Earl of Oxton, but poor. Miss Belsize was at heart what schoolboys call "a good sort"; but she was also a very managing person. She managed her sister-in-law so well that the poor little parsoness was sometimes tempted to wish that she had never been born, or that she had remained Jane Skinner to the end of her days.

The rector was a stout, comfortable man of moderate views, and a gentleman. He sympathised with his wife, but always counselled her to let Elizabeth have her own way.

"It pleases her, my dear; and really it doesn't matter," was his favourite formula for soothing his wife into compliance with some new demand on her patience. And "poor Mrs. Belsize," as all her friends called her always gave way.

The new curate turned out to be a tall and rather bulky person, with a pasty complexion, clean-shaven except for a short section of stubby whisker on either cheek. His eyes were small, dark, and set, as it were, on the outer surface of his face. His hair was black. It was parted in the middle, long, and wavy. His Roman collar was spotless. His long coat was of sound material and well-built.

Such was the outward appearance of the Rev. Martin L. Noble.

"You are a moderate churchman, I believe, Mr. Noble?" asked Miss Belsize during dinner.

The curate smiled and bowed assent.

"I am very glad to hear it," said the lady, in her deep, bell-like voice. "Do you approve of 'Hymns Ancient and Modern'?" she queried, after a pause.

There was absolutely nothing to guide the examinee, not the slightest indication whether he would be required to bless or to ban the well-known hymn-book.

"I should not like to say that I approve of every word and every line——" he began, with an air of bland impartiality.

"I should think not, indeed!" burst out Miss Belsize.

The sailing course seemed now plain enough.

"There are hymns in that book," continued the curate, with a solemn contraction of visage, "which——" Here the speaker caught a look of annoyance on the rector's face, and instead of saying, as he had intended, "which have a distinctly Romanist tendency," he substituted, with perfect self-possession, "which no collection could very well spare."

The rector laughed in his sleeve, and the lady was but partially satisfied. But the new curate soon made Miss Belsize understand that his views exactly coincided with her own, and thereupon he advanced rapidly in the lady's favour.

She lent Mr. Noble a copy of Miss Havergal's Poetical Works; and when the curate brought it back with many expressions of admiration for the poetry, and of gratitude to her who had placed such gems within his reach, Miss Belsize went so far as to take a pen and write on the fly-leaf, "Martin L. Noble, from his sincere friend and well-wisher, E. B."

Mr. Noble had already explained to the rector's sister that his second name was Luther, but that he hesitated about using it, partly because he was unwilling to challenge comparison with so great a man, partly because Luther (not having the good fortune to be born an Englishman) countenanced some doctrines which were hardly Scriptural.

It will be seen from these trifling circumstances that Miss Belsize and Mr. Noble were no way averse to each other's society; but whether the curate had the courage—the foolhardiness one might say,—to become a suitor for

that lady's hand was not certain. Public opinion in the parish was divided on the question.

The unmarried ladies between twenty-five and forty ridiculed the idea of the curate's having any serious intentions with regard to the rector's sister. But there were other parishioners who shook their heads and smiled in a knowing way when the subject was broached in their hearing.

Speculation on the point was stopped, however, by an event of such transcendent importance that it eclipsed all matters of ordinary interest. A report reached Bedminton that the Prime Minister had selected the Reverend Charles Belsize to be Bishop of St. Ninian's; and the report turned out to be true.

The fact was, that the unexpected demise of two intermediate heirs had made it highly probable that the Rector of Bedminton would before long become the twenty-ninth Earl of Alderney; and the Premier, no doubt, judged that it would conduce to the dignity and glory of the Church if a lay and spiritual peerage were united in the same person.

The newly-appointed bishop quickly resigned his living, and in the course of a few weeks took up his residence at the palace at St. Ninian's along with his wife and sister.

As for the duties at Bedminton, Mr. Noble continued to discharge them pending the appointment of a new rector. He naturally found it desirable to seek advice from his late rector pretty often on matters parochial; and as Bedminton was but a few miles distant from the cathedral city, Mr. Noble was nearly as often at the palace as he had formerly been at the rectory.

It often happened that the bishop was from home when the curate-in-charge came to seek counsel from him; and frequently, on these occasions, the multifarious duties which now devolved on Mrs. Belsize compelled her to leave it to her sister-in-law to entertain Mr. Noble. When this happened Mr. Noble seemed particularly well satisfied, and Miss Belsize also appeared to be well content.

One night, after this sort of thing had been going on for some time, Mrs. Belsize, with a very pleased look on her pretty face, hinted to her lord that perhaps it might be as well if he spoke a word or two to Mr. Noble.

"About what, my dear?" asked the bishop, sleepily.

"Well, about Elizabeth, you know," said the young matron, blushing a little as she spoke.

"Good gracious, Jane!" cried his lordship in much alarm, "you don't mean that I should ask the man what his intentions are with regard to my sister?"

"Certainly not," responded his wife with some dignity. "That would be absurd. Besides, it would be useless. His intentions, his hopes, I should rather say, are clear enough. Elizabeth and he understand each other perfectly. And, oh! Charles, I am so glad!"

The prelate was not so enthusiastic. He quite appreciated the advantage of getting his sister to manage somebody else, instead of him and his wife; but the Reverend Martin L. Noble was not exactly the kind of a man he would have chosen for a brother-in-law.

"Are you sure?" he asked dubiously.

"Oh, yes. Elizabeth told me to-day. 'Mr. Noble and I understand one another perfectly.' These were her very words."

"Then, if she has made up her mind, why need I meddle?"

"Because I think he seems to be in some doubt as to the Bedminton living. It is in Elizabeth's gift, you know; and naturally she would present Mr. Noble. But he can't marry till he gets a living; and as she is the patron I fancy he has a delicacy in broaching the subject to her."

"Delicacy? I shouldn't have thought—well, it is rather a delicate thing to ask a woman for her hand and a living at the same time; and, as you say, he can't take the one unless he gets the other. I think all the more of Noble for his hesitating to speak under these circumstances. But Elizabeth should be able to—to make things clear to him. If she has made up her mind—that's the main point, you know."

"Oh, yes; I'm sure she has, Charles."

"I will see her in the morning, then; and, if she wishes it, I'll say a word to Mr. Noble, from which he will be able to understand how the land lies. I suppose he really has been—eh?"

"No one who has ever seen them together could have any doubt on that point," said the bishop's wife decisively; and the matrimonial conference was at an end.

The bishop, after a little consideration, made up his mind that the curate of Bedminton was as good a match as his sister was likely to make, and being keenly alive to the inconvenience of her remaining permanently at the palace, he took an early opportunity of saying a word or two to Mr. Noble.

"My wife tells me," he said pleasantly, "that you and Miss Belsize have seen a good deal of each other lately—have been a good deal in each other's company; in fact—ahem."

The curate seemed confused, changed colour, ejaculated "Oh, my lord!" and murmured something indistinct.

"Well, that's all as it should be, I suppose. I don't know that I have any objection," said the prelate, hurrying on to the other branch of his subject. "But as to ways and means. Of course you know the living of Bedminton is in my sister's gift, as a sole surviving trustee of—of a settlement; and I see no reason why she shouldn't present you."

"Oh, my lord!" cried the Rev. Martin Noble, clasping his hands, "you take a load off my mind! I could not bring myself to ask Miss Belsize for the preferment, while——"

"Just so," said the good bishop with a smile. "It would have been awkward. I understand. But I think we may regard the matter as being settled now. And we shall be glad to see you at the palace any day next week—say Tuesday."

"Thank you a thousand times, my lord. There is, however, one thing that occurs to me, which it might be well to mention. The Bishop of Warminster, I happen to know, is going to marry his daughter to the Vicar of Pendlebury, a Mr. Marks—a very excellent pr—clergyman, but hardly of sufficient standing in the diocese. It happens that the rectory of Wichgate, in the Warminster diocese, is vacant at present; the right of presentation belongs to the Bishop. He would like to present his future son-in-law; but he hesitates to do so, for reasons which—which I need not go into. He fears that people might say that a bishop's son-in-law ——"

"I see—I see. Most ridiculous. All cant and nonsense. As if a patron could not be sure of his own flesh and blood—or, well, a man deemed worthy to be his son-in-law—than he could be of a stranger."

"Certainly, my lord; most certainly."

The Bishop was not quite sure, but he rather thought that there was a suspicion, a suggestion of ing, as if the

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curate had really said "certingly." It hurt him to think that his sister should marry a man to whom a suspicion of that nature could attach itself; but things had gone too far for him to recede.

"Still, people say unpleasant things, which get into the newspapers, and tend to undermine a clergyman's influence for good."

"Just so."

"I fear that there might be talk of that kind about Mr. Marks, and it might do harm. Now, it has occurred to me that if Miss Belsize were to be so very kind as to present Mr. Marks to Bedminton, and if at the same time your Lordship would be so good as to mention my name to the Bishop of Warminster in connection with the living of Wichgate——"

"I see—I see. Virtually an exchange of living between you and this Mr. Marks. By this means a good deal of ignorant, spiteful talk might be prevented—eh? I'll think it over; and if my sister approves of the plan, I'll ask my brother of Warminster's chaplain to come over and have a chat with me. I have no doubt that things can be arranged, Miss Belsize presents Mr. Marks to Bedminton; the Bishop of Warminster gives you Wichgate instead. Very good. Are the livings of the same value?"

"As nearly as possible the same, my lord. And I may say that Wichgate is in every sense as desirable a place of residence as Bedminton."

"Then no doubt I shall be able to arrange the matter satisfactorily," quoth the prelate, turning to leave the room.

The Bishop of St. Ninian's was, in fact, delighted with his future brother-in-law's suggestion. The exchange of livings would blunt the edge of any attack on the Bishop of Warminster; and for himself he felt that, much as he loved his sister, it would suit him better if on her marriage she were transferred to another diocese. It sometimes seemed to him that Miss Belsize was gradually undertaking the management of the See of St. Ninian's.

* * * * *

It was unfortunate that just at this juncture Mr. Noble had an attack of influenza, which confined him to the house; and when he recovered so far as to go out of doors, he proceeded at once, under the doctor's instructions, to the seaside.

But the wedding-day of the Rev. William Marks and the Bishop of Warminster's daughter had been already fixed, and it was necessary that, if the scheme of exchanging livings was to be carried out, it should be done at once.

Thus it happened that the formalities of presentation and institution had to take place before the new rector of Wichgate had an opportunity of seeing Miss Belsize. Indeed, it was only by accident that Mrs. Belsize heard that Mr. Noble had gone to Wichgate direct from Brighton, and "read himself in."

"He might have come here in the first place," said Miss Belsize, with some asperity in her tone; "but perhaps he was too weak to come so far, while there was probably some legal necessity for his entering into possession of his living at once."

"Perhaps so. But, I say, Elizabeth—"

"Why will you persist in using that odious phrase, 'I say'? Especially now, my dear, when, as the wife of a bishop, your example naturally attracts attention."

Mrs. Belsize's cheek flushed: she clenched her little fist under the table. Was she a child to be talked to in this way? As a mark of her displeasure, she kept silence till her sister-in-law begged her to resume her discourse.

"I was only going to suggest," she said, "that as we are engaged to dine and sleep at Warminster to-morrow night, we might drive over to the Wichgate, from Warminster in the morning, and see your new home."

Miss Belsize readily fell in with this proposal; and on the following day the two ladies proceeded to Wichgate Rectory from Warminster in a hired fly. During the drive Miss Belsize was engaged in composing dignified, yet cutting reproofs for her defaulting and ungrateful lover. The rectory, as Mrs. Belsize kindly pointed out, seemed all that was desirable; but the furniture of the drawing-room, into which the two ladies were shown, was not a soul-satisfying nature.

"Of course this must be entirely altered," Miss Belsize was saying to her sister-in-law as the door opened, and a woman with fat brown curls (palpably false) on her forehead, came in. She made a profound curtesy, and glanced inquiringly from one of her visitors to the other, while the heart of Miss Belsize sank within her as she asked herself, "Can this be his mother?"

"W'ich of you two ladies, may I ask, is Miss Belsize?" inquired the little old lady, clasping her m'ittened hands in front of her.

'This is she," said the Bishop's wife; upon which the old lady ran up to Elizabeth, caught her hands, carried them to her breast, and turned her eyes slowly to the ceiling, until her face was nearly horizontal.

"Our benefactress!" murmured she. "With all respects to our Bishop's lady" (another curtesy) "but our benefactress" (an arch affectionate glance towards Miss Belsize) "must 'ave the first place in our 'arts always."

"But I don't understand," said Miss Belsize, with her usual deliberate emphasis. "Who are you? Are you Mr. Noble's mother?"

"Oh, dear no, madam" (with a smile of surpassing archness). "I'm her mother."

"Whose?"

"The bride's mother, you know. We only came on Thursday—the marriage was only a week ago—so really, you know, this is a bit of the honeymoon. They had been engaged twelve months, and it might have been twelve years but for your goodness, madam. My son-in-law has explained everything to me. The appointment was nominally that of the Bishop, but really——" Another expressive glance, more arch even than the former one.

"Good heavens!" thought Miss Belsize, "what has that man been daring to say to those two women about me?"

Her indignation gave her strength; but it was hard—oh—it was hard—to have such ample causes of anger and not be able to show a trace of it. Miss Belsize was unable to sit still long. She got up, and muttering something by way of adieu, went to the fly which still waited for the two ladies, followed by her sister-in-law, and totally unmoved by the entreaties of Mrs. Herbert (so the small, stout, elderly person was named) to wait and receive the grateful thanks of the bride and bridegroom.

As Miss Belsize stepped into the fly she caught sight of a figure in black—the Rev. Martin Noble's—crowned by a very wide black felt hat. One of his arms was concealed behind the figure of a young woman, whose head reposed comfortably somewhere in the neighbourhood of the wide black felt. The two were coming on slowly towards the house, all unconscious of Mrs. Herbert, who was standing at an open window waving her arms at them to attract their attention.

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"Good gracious!" said Miss Belsize to herself, "they should see that old lunatic! If she should take it into her head to shout to them!"

She hurried into the fly, and astonished the somnolent flyman by the energy of her tone as she commanded him to drive back to Warminster.

During the drive she maintained a solemn silence; and never afterwards was she heard to allude to the Rector of Wichgate, or to any of his ways, words, or work.

But not long after the visit paid by the two ladies to Wichgate Rectory Mr. Noble received an invitation, which he well knew was a summons, from his new diocesan.

"Look here, Mr. Noble," said the Bishop of Warminster, "will you give me plain answers to one or two plain questions? Did I not appoint you to the living of Wichgate at the suggestion of Miss Belsize?"

"I believe so, my lord," said the Rector with a bow.

"And did she not recommend you to me because it was understood that you and she were to be married?"

"What, my lord? Do I hear aright? I? Married to Miss Belsize?" and the reverend gentleman's eyes wandered about the room, as if seeking a clue to the mystery.

"Come now, sir," said the Bishop sternly, "I am speaking as one man of the world to another. Was it not so arranged?"

"Never, my lord. I am ready to take my oath of it."

"Or understood?"

"Not in the least, so far as I was concerned. Why, my lord, during the conversation between the Bishop of St. Ninian's and myself there was not a syllable——"

"Perhaps not. But was there no love-making?"

"Love-making?" echoed the Rector with a smile. "Your Lordship cannot be personally acquainted with Miss Belsize."

"She seems to have thought so, at any rate," said the Bishop bluntly.

"It is possible, and it grieves me to the heart to think that it should be possible," said Mr. Noble, pausing for a moment as if to concentrate his intellect in an act of the purest justice. "I can only say, or rather hint, that some ladies, after they pass a certain age, are notoriously liable to mistake the most ordinary politeness for—I need say no more. Doubtless your Lordship understands."

"Yes; I think I do understand," said the bishop slowly, and with a glance so peculiar that for the first time in his life Mr. Noble felt abashed.

There, perforce, the matter ended. The Rector of Wichgate is a very popular man, and he is confident that the bishop of Warminster will soon forget the unpleasant circumstance which attended his first coming into the diocese.

It may be mentioned that not long ago Mr. Noble presented several volumes (the sweepings of his library) to the Wichgate Sunday school and Parochial Book Club. Among them was a beautifully bound copy of Miss Havergal's poems, the fly-leaf of which was missing. The rector is now a High Churchman; he has dropped the "Luther" altogether, even the initial.

Miss Belsize still resides at the episcopal palace of St. Ninian's, but it is understood in the diocese that she is to be united in the bond of holy matrimony to the Rev. Simeon Baldun one of his Lordship's chaplains, as soon as a suitable living falls vacant. It is likewise understood in the diocese that the marriage ceremony is to precede the rite of institution to the benefice.

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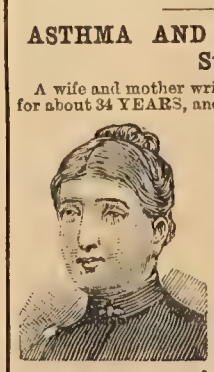

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HE OBJECTED TO OPERAS.

THE town of L—— is one of the most quiet and old-fashioned of Scotch towns. Nevertheless, L—— has an opera house. The building was formerly the lecture-room, and was used for town meetings, but recently it was resolved to convert it into an opera house suitable for the performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Naturally there was a great deal of opposition to this on the part of the older inhabitants. The most energetic of the anti-opera house party was Mr. Brewster, a prosperous varnish dealer, and an elder of the Kirk. He said that no man could approve of an opera house. This failed to convince those who advocated the opera house scheme, and they openly said that Mr. Brewster was an old fogey.

The final result, however, was that the opera house party gained their end, and the old lecture-room was transformed into a very respectable imitation of a small theatre. A company had engaged to produce *H.M.S. Pinafore* at L——, and it was at one time feared that the opera house would not be ready for them. The seats were wooden chairs with perforated bottoms, and on the day before that advertised for the performance they were still unvarnished owing to an oversight on the part of the building committee.

It was obvious that no time was to be lost; the committee, therefore, went to Mr. Brewster, and explained that they wanted a quantity of best varnish without delay. Somewhat to their surprise, Mr. Brewster consented to sell the varnish, and even showed a good deal of energy in the matter. This injured him in the estimation of the opponents of the opera house, who said that they could not understand how so good a man could sell his principles as well as his varnish.

All the opera house people laughed derisively, some of them going so far as to say that the elder of the Kirk could always be counted upon not to permit his principles to interfere with his business, and that the only really earnest moralists were those who built opera houses and attended representations of *Pinafore*. The house was varnished, however, and on the next evening it was opened by the new *Pinafore* company. Every one of the seven hundred seats was occupied, and it must be admitted that among the audience were many of the leading citizens of the town and their wives and daughters.

The first act of the play was listened to with the most serious attention, and when the curtain fell, not a single person went out for a breath of fresh air. The manager was delighted, and remarked to the leading actor that he had never seen so intelligent an audience in the whole course of his life. The second act was received with the same quiet attention, and there was even a look of painful anxiety on the faces of several of the men in the audience.

Sir Joseph began to feel annoyed at their solemnity, and asked the manager if the people took him for an undertaker, and believed they were attending a funeral.

At the end of the act there was the same absence of the apparent want of fresh air amongst the young men that had been noticed after the first act. The play came to an end, and the curtain fell amid a silence as of the grave. The orchestra rose and departed, but the audience sat still. The manager came to the footlights and announced that the play was over, and, as the announcement had no apparent effect, begged to be informed whether the opera house was a deaf and dumb asylum, or whether he himself had suddenly become stark mad.

It was then that Sandy Mactavish beckoned him to his side, and explained that the audience would gladly retire if any way could be devised of separating them from their seats. No fewer than eight gallons of turpentine were bought from Mr. Brewster that night, and used in detaching the ladies from the seats, to which the undried varnish had glued them. When the ladies had all disappeared, the male part of the audience, with many irreverent exclamations and cries of anguish, tore itself loose, and went home through the back streets.

The opera house has remained closed ever since the opening night, and it is the belief of L——that Mr Brewster, who mixed the varnish, and who was subsequently found in his shop at eleven o'clock at night, ready to sell turpentine in quantities to suit purchasers, deliberately brought about the catastrophe that broke up their *Pinafore* season.

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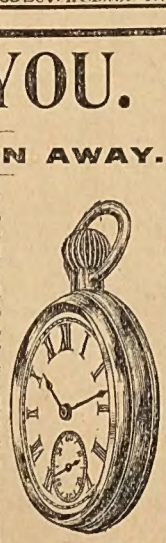

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I'VE FOUND IT AT LAST.

S. N.—It is in Warwickshire and Staffordshire that a discordant singer is called a "Bromwich throstle." If a stranger, he possibly flatters himself on the appellation; but to say to a native that he "sings like a Bromwich throstle" is an insult, for the title, like that of "Jerusalem cuckoo," really signifies donkey.

Legion.—About 54,000 Frenchmen belong to the Legion of Honour; 32,000 of these are connected with the army. The rest are civilians.

M. P.—The House of Commons recognises no reports of its debates, and has always declared that to report them is a breach of its privileges. This is still the existing law, although these reports have been made without hindrance for more than one hundred years.

R. T. — Breeches among the Greeks were the garments of slavery.

Miles.—A Burman mile is about equal in length to two English miles. The word for "mile" in Burmese means "to sit," and a mile is the distance that a man goes before he considers it necessary to sit down.

Gilt.—From 14,000 to 16,000 persons are actively engaged in the jewellery trade of Birmingham, and the amount of capital embarked in it is larger than that of any other Birmingham industry. The annual consumption of gold is in value £750,000, and of silver £350,000.

O. P. T.—Some first-class glass eyes cost about £10 to manufacture.

Insomnia thinks that when a person has a trouble to fall asleep, he should put his head under his arm—"as birds put their heads under their wings."————It is a common error to suppose that birds sleep with the head beneath the wing. No bird ever sleeps so; the head is turned round and laid upon the back, where it is often concealed by feathers.

Motion.—There is a clock at Brussels which comes about as near being a perpetual-motion machine as can be invented, for the sun does the winding. A shaft exposed to the solar rays causes an up-draught of air which sets the fan in motion. The fan actuates mechanism which raises the weight of the clock until it reaches the top, and then puts a break on the fan till the weight has gone down a little, when the fan is again liberated and proceeds to act as before.

J. S.—£324,000 is the amount which Messrs. W. D. and H. O. Wills, Ltd., the tobacco manufacturers, have paid for duty during the month of March alone.

A. N.—It was once customary in this country for a person going abroad to "put out" a certain sum of money on condition of receiving good interest for it on his return home. If he never returned, the deposit was forfeited.

Algy.—The small town of Werda, Dahomey, is celebrated for its temple of serpents, a long building in which the priests keep upwards of 1,000 serpents of all sizes, which they feed with birds and frogs brought to them as offerings by the natives. These serpents, many of them of enormous size, may be seen hanging from the beams across the ceiling, with their heads hanging downward, and in all sorts of strange contortions. It often happens that some of these serpents make their way out of the temple into the town, and the priests have great difficulty in coaxing them back.

Will.— Thousands of people visit Shakespeare's birthplace annually, all nationalities being represented.

Safe.—There are about 400 banks in the United Kingdom.

W. P.—White and red wines owe their difference to the fact that while the former is permitted to ferment without the grape skins, these are allowed to remain in the case of the latter. The colour of the grapes makes no difference whatever to the colour of the wine which they produce, for the juice of all grapes is as nearly as possible colourless. For instance, the grape which yields champagne is almost black to outward appearance.

Tommy.—Desertions from the German army are very numerous. It is stated that nearly 40,000 men desert every year.

Liber. — So valuable were books in the Dark Ages, that donations of them are recorded as acts of signal generosity, deserving perpetual remembrance. The value of books may be seen by the fact that in 690 the King of Northumberland gave 800 acres of land for one book containing a history of the world. A Countess of Anjou gave 200 sheep and a large parcel of rich furs for a volume of homilies. In 1420 a Latin Bible was valued at £30, at a time when two arches of London Bridge were built for less money.

N. G.—Quite eight hundred British parishes have populations of less than one hundred souls.

A painstaking correspondent informs me that the average head of hair worn by a woman, if placed end to end, would measure fifty miles in length. He thinks it well for the ladies that their head adornment is cut up into short lengths.

F. S.—The average wholesale price realised for the fifty or sixty millions of oysters landed on our coasts during the year is about 7d. a dozen.

Palace.—The magnitude of the Escurial, the great Spanish palace, may be inferred from the computation of Francisco de les Santos that it would take four days to go through all the rooms and apartments, the length of the way being reckoned at twenty-three Spanish leagues, which is about 120 English miles. There are 14,000 doors and 11,000 windows in the edifice.

Dent.—Oh, no! Artificial teeth have been found in skulls in Etruscan tombs dating back to 600 B.C.

South.—Yes; on the summit of Ben Lomond you will see the smallest tree that grows in this country. It is known as the dwarf willow, and is, when mature, only about two inches in height.

Med.—Four millions of pills are taken by the inhabitants of the United Kingdom every week. In France the quantity is about one-half. Only about one million are taken by the people of Russia.

M. E.—A Persian never takes a dose of physic until he has previously obtained a favourable answer from heaven in the shape of an omen. Should he have the potion at his lips, if he happens to sneeze it is enough; the physic is thrown to the dogs, and another practitioner is called in.

Janette.—Before purchasing summer dresses, all ladies should see the new patented material "Iroganil" Glystre. It is entirely different from anything shown previously, and is incredibly effective at the price of 1s. 11½d. upwards, double width. Your draper should have 30 varieties, if not, write Manufacturers, Iroganil Glystre, Bradford, for address.

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Printed and Published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., at Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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